ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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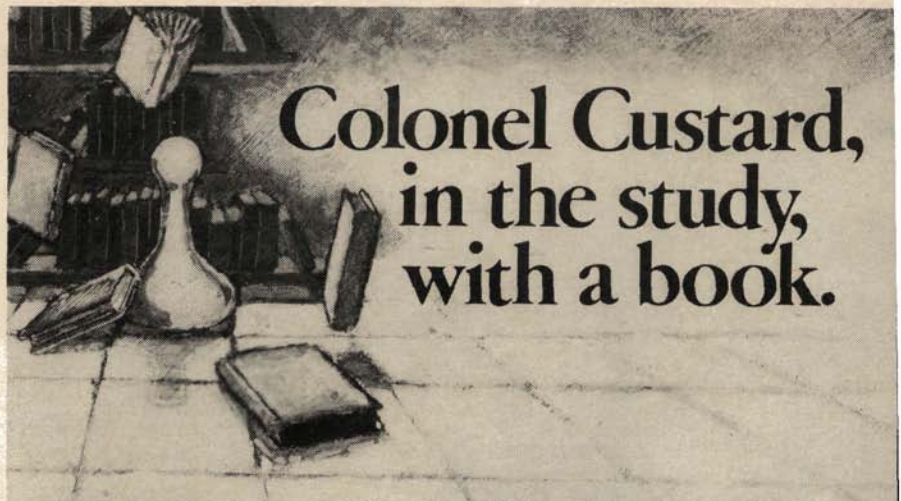

Colonel Custard, in the study, with a book.

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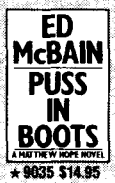

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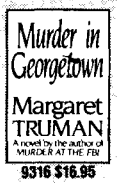

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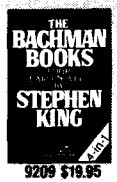

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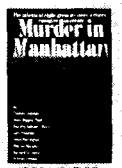

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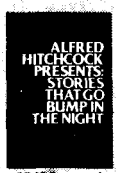

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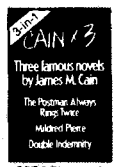

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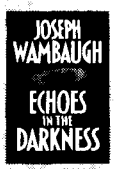

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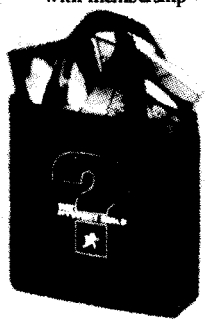

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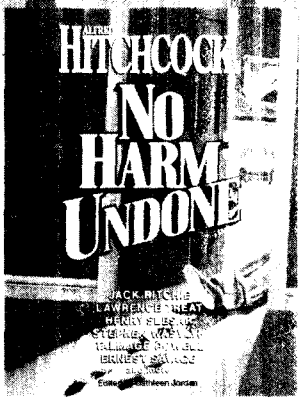

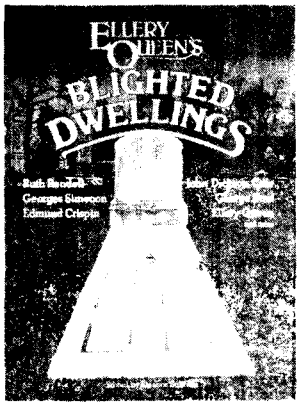

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On our cover this issue are actress
MARGE REDMOND
and EQMM associate designer
DENNIS DOYLE

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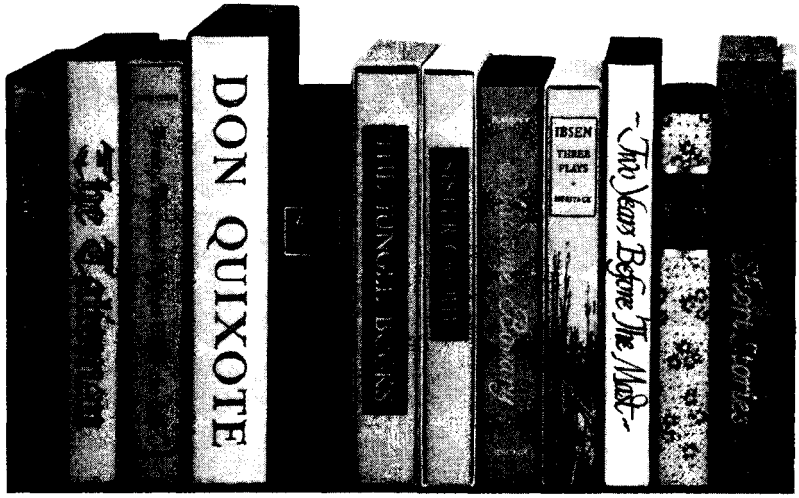

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

As his nurse April climbed out of the Mercedes, Dr. Sam said impulsively, "Let's drive it up to Maine."

"Maine? In January?"

"Why not? It's been a fairly open winter and the roads are clear. We might even try some skiing."

"No, thanks. I don't want a leg in a cast." But it was obvious the idea of a vacation intrigued her. "What would we do about your patients?"

"Doc Handleman's offered to take care of them if I want to get away for a week. I'm filling in for him in March when he goes to Florida."

"Let's do it," April decided with an impish grin. "But remember, no skiing!"

And so begins a special case in this series that displays Edward D. Hoch's remarkable expertise in the vanishing art of the locked-room story . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE SNOWBOUND CABIN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam Hawthorne settled down in his favorite chair, took a sip of brandy, and said, "I wanted to tell you about my vacation in Maine back in January of 'thirty-five and I suppose you wonder why any sane person would drive up to Maine in the middle of winter, especially in the days before turnpikes and expressways. Well, I suppose it was because of the car . . ."

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My major weakness (Dr. Sam continued) has always been sports-cars. When I completed my internship, my father and mother presented me with a yellow 1921 Pierce-Arrow Runabout and it was the pride of my life until it was destroyed in an explosion. The cars I owned after that, in the early 1930s, were unsatisfactory shadows of that great vehicle. Then, in early '35, I finally found the car of my dreams—a Mercedes-Benz 500K Special Roadster in glorious red. It was expensive, of course, but by that time I'd been a practicing physician for over twelve years and in my single state I'd managed to save a fair amount of money from my country practice.

I purchased the car in Boston, and when I drove up to the office wing at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital with it, my nurse April couldn't believe her eyes.

"You *bought* it, Sam? It's *yours?*"

"That's right. Hawthorne's folly."

She ran her hands over the red lacquer, admiring the long sleek lines of the engine housing. We tried out the rumble seat together and examined the twin spare tires mounted behind it. Then I let her take the car for a drive around the hospital parking lot. "It's a dream, Sam!" she said. "I never saw anything like it!"

April had been with me since I came to Northmont, and a decade earlier we'd had a brief vacation on Cape Cod together, but our relationship had remained platonic. I liked April as a friend and found her perfect as a nurse, but no spark of romance had ever developed between us. She was a few years older than I, in her late thirties, but still an attractive woman for the right man. Though we never discussed her private life, I had the feeling the right man hadn't yet appeared within the confines of Northmont.

It was against this background that I impulsively said, as she climbed out of the Mercedes, "Let's drive it up to Maine."

"Maine? In January?"

"Why not? It's been a fairly open winter and the roads are clear. We might even try some skiing."

"No, thanks, I don't want a leg in a cast." But I could see the idea of a vacation intrigued her. "What would we do about your patients?"

"Doc Handleman's offered to take care of them if I want to get away for a week. I'm filling in for him in March when he goes to Florida."

"Let's do it," April decided with an impish grin. "But remember, no skiing . . . !"

We set off at the beginning of the following week, driving north

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through Massachusetts and into New Hampshire. The car handled like a dream, and though it was far too cold to drive with the convertible top down, the right-hand steering wheel and the long hood gave the feeling of driving something foreign and fast. I'd telephoned ahead and made reservations at a vacation lodge north of Bangor, so even after we crossed the state line into Maine we had a long drive ahead of us.

"It's starting to snow," April pointed out as the first fine flakes hit the windshield.

"I guess we were lucky to get this far without it."

The snow was light but steady for the remainder of our journey, and when we reached the Greenbush Inn a few inches had accumulated on the road. I parked in the shelter of a large pine tree and took our bags out of the rumble seat where they'd been stored. The lodge was a large structure built entirely of logs, reminding me of the number one resource of the Maine woods. Inside a cheery lobby with the fireside atmosphere of a cozy living room, we were greeted by a tall dark man in his forties whose speech held just a hint of an accent.

"Good afternoon and welcome to Greenbush. I am your host, Andre Mulhone."

"Dr. Sam Hawthorne," I said, extending my hand. "And this is—"

"Ah, Mrs. Hawthorne!"

"No—," I continued my introduction, "—I've booked separate rooms."

Andre Mulhone smiled. "Separate but connecting. If you'll sign the register, I'll show them to you."

"We'll be here for six nights."

"Very good."

Our rooms were pleasant and when we went down for dinner an hour later, Mulhone motioned us to join him at his table. "I despise dining alone," he said. "Please dine with me."

It was an enjoyable meal, and I could see April warming to Andre. He told us about his French-Irish background and about his wife who had been killed the previous winter when her car skidded off the road. "What was her name?" April asked sympathetically.

"Lois. I have a picture of her in my wallet. When she went out of my life, I had very little to keep me going. We had no children and the inn was all I had to occupy myself."

He showed us a snapshot of a pleasant-looking woman about his age. "What a nice smile," April commented.

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Mulhone's conversation at dinner reflected cosmopolitan interests I found surprising in the Maine woods. At one moment he'd be speaking of Thoreau's visit there a century earlier and the next he was discussing Adolf Hitler, who was threatening all of Europe. It wasn't the sort of discussion I ever had back in Northmont.

"What's there to do around here?" I asked, adding, "Neither of us ski."

Andre Mulhone shrugged. "Skiing is an Alpine sport. I often wonder if it will be as popular in America as it is in Switzerland and Norway. I understand, though, that it is gaining popularity in Minnesota among the Scandinavians. And who knows? There is a new invention called the ski lift, which could revolutionize the pastime. One can ski downhill and ride back up."

"But you have no skiing at Greenbush?" April asked.

"No. But we have snowshoeing and hiking. Let me fit you both out with snowshoes in the morning and I'll show you a bit of the countryside."

I was sure Mulhone's special interest in us had more to do with April than with me, but I had no cause for complaint. He was a charming man and an excellent conversationalist. I went to bed looking forward to the morning.

It was bright and brisk, with a north wind that made us turn up our collars as we waited for Andre to join us in front of the lodge. April had her eyes on the door and I let mine wander to the pine tree where I'd parked my Mercedes. I was startled to see a young man in a plaid jacket hovering by it. In one hand he carried a shotgun.

I strolled over. "Admiring the car?" I said.

"It's a beauty. Is it yours?"

"That's right."

"You staying at the lodge?"

I nodded. "My name is Sam Hawthorne."

"I'm Gus Laxault. I do some odd jobs around here."

"With a shotgun?"

"Been out shootin' varmints. When there's a snow cover and they can't get food easily, they come in to our rubbish dump. Got me a bobcat this morning."

"I didn't realize we were that close to nature."

Laxault was more interested in the Mercedes. "First one of these

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I've seen," he said, running his hand over the fender. "I'll bet it set you back a good piece of money."

"It wasn't cheap." I didn't want to pursue the conversation any longer. When I moved away from the car, I was relieved that he followed along.

Mulhone had arrived by this time, carrying three pairs of snowshoes. He frowned at Laxault and seemed about to say something, then to think better of it. The varmint-hunter veered off and disappeared around the back of the lodge.

"Oh, it's a perfect morning!" April was radiant.

"We had snow last night back in the hills," Andre said. "You'll find it quite deep in spots." He knelt to fit April's snowshoes while I struggled with the pair he gave me.

"How many people do you employ here?" I asked.

"It depends on how busy we are. If we have many reservations for a particular weekend, I call on some temporary help from town."

"Is Laxault one of your temporaries?"

"He does odd jobs, but he's a bit unreliable."

"He told me he shot a bobcat this morning."

"He probably did. During the winter they come looking for food."

We started out, heading north across a frozen lake and up the side of a gentle hill. April and I were unaccustomed to snowshoes and walking with them wasn't as easy as it looked. My leg muscles were aching before we'd covered the first mile.

"We can rest at Ted Shorter's cabin on the other side of this hill," Mulhone suggested. "It's hard walking in this cold wind if you're not used to it."

"Who's Ted Shorter?"

"A retired stockbroker who moved up here a few years ago. He lives by himself, but he's friendly enough if you come to visit."

Once we reached the crest of the hill, the cabin came into view. A Ford sedan was parked nearby, but the road was completely buried by the snow that had drifted across the cabin's front door. There was smoke coming from the chimney.

"He must be home," Mulhone observed. "The fireplace is going and there are no tracks out of the house."

Following his lead, we made our way down the hill. April pointed off to the left. "Are those bobcat tracks?"

Mulhone went closer to them and said, "I think so. They're about nine inches apart. It might be the one Gus Laxault shot." The tracks wandered toward the corner of the cabin and then went off in the

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other direction. The drifted snow grew deeper near the cabin and I doubted we could have made it without snowshoes. When we reached the door, Mulhone pounded on it with a gloved fist.

When no one came, he tried the knob. "It's unlocked," he said and carefully pushed it open, letting the drifted snow fall in on the floor. He turned a switch and a single overhead light came on. Over his shoulder, I saw a pleasant room with a large easy chair drawn up to the fire. Sunshine from a skylight in the roof flooded the room. I could make out a sleeping loft with an unmade bed and some dirty breakfast dishes on a dining table.

We could see the top of someone's head in the easy chair and Mulhone hurried forward while April and I waited in the doorway. "Ted, it's Andre. I was out snowshoeing and stopped to—" He bent over the chair, shaking the man slightly. Then I saw his face change.

"What is it?" I asked, starting forward.

"My God—he's been stabbed."

I took one look and saw it was true. And that the man in the chair was dead.

Mulhone used the crank phone on the wall to call the authorities.

When he arrived a half hour later, Sheriff Petty proved to be quite different from Sheriff Lens, my best friend back home in Northmont. He seemed out of place in the backwoods—a tall, slim, frowning man who wore an expensive leather coat over his tailored uniform. He wanted to know what had brought us to the cabin that morning. Though he'd ignored me during the initial questioning, he perked up when he learned I was a doctor.

"We don't have a full-time coroner right now," he said. "Is there any chance you could estimate the time of death for us, Dr. Hawthorne?"

"I could try," I told him, "but the body was so close to the fireplace it's hard to be accurate. There's no sign of rigor mortis. He could have been dead anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Certainly no longer than a few hours. The fact that the fire was still burning when we entered the cabin tells us something. It would have burned itself out over a longer period."

"Then he was killed after sunrise."

"I'd say so, yes. It was around ten o'clock when we found him. There were unwashed breakfast dishes and the lights were out."

"The snow stopped before the sun was up." Sheriff Petty turned

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to Mulhone. "There was no one else here when you entered the cabin?"

"Only poor Shorter."

"And no tracks leading in or out?"

Andre shook his head.

"No tracks," I confirmed. "We searched the cabin and looked out in all directions. This is the only door and the snow was drifted against it when we arrived. The windows were all closed and latched against the cold. Nothing came near the place except for a bobcat."

"The killer must have been here all night," the sheriff decided. "But then how did he get away without leaving tracks?"

"Suicide," Mulhone said. "It's the only answer."

Sheriff Petty's frown deepened. "If it's suicide, what happened to the weapon?"

It was a fair enough question, and for the moment we had no answer.

They took the body away, pulling it on a sled up the snow-covered hill, then down the other side till they reached the road that was clear. We headed back to the lodge.

"Tell me about Shorter," I said to Andre. "Who do you think would want to kill him?"

The innkeeper shrugged. "Someone from his past, I suppose. I doubt if he saw enough people around here to make enemies. As I said before, he was friendly enough but he kept to himself."

"Did he ever come over to the lodge?"

"Hardly at all." Then he snapped his fingers at a sudden thought. "But he did show up just a few days ago. He came to visit a woman who's staying here. I remember being surprised to see him, but then I thought no more about it."

"Is she still here?"

"Mrs. Deveroux—yes, I believe she is."

I left April enjoying Andre's company and sought out the number of Mrs. Deveroux's room. The desk clerk pointed across the lobby at a slim woman in her thirties who was glancing through a fashion magazine. I thanked him and walked over to her. "Pardon me. Mrs. Deveroux?"

She turned and smiled. "Yes. Do I know you?"

"I haven't had the pleasure. My name is Sam Hawthorne."

"And I'm Faith Deveroux, as you seem to know. What can I do for you?" She put down the magazine.

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"It's about Ted Shorter. I understand you knew him."

"Knew?"

"I'm sorry. I thought you'd heard by now. Mr. Shorter was found dead in his cabin this morning."

She swayed and started to fall out of her chair. I caught her just in time.

When she'd regained her composure, Faith Deveroux took a sip of the brandy I'd ordered and said, "You'll have to excuse me. I haven't fainted in years."

"I'm sorry my news was such a shock."

She leaned back against the sofa in the lobby. There had been no fuss—only the desk clerk had seen her fall and I had quickly revived her. "It shouldn't have been, really. He was someone I knew a long time ago. What was it—a heart attack?"

"He was stabbed in the chest."

"You mean someone *killed* him?" Her pallid face might have grown a shade paler.

"It might have been suicide, but that's doubtful. Could you tell me something about him, about why he chose to live here away from everyone?"

"That's simple enough. Ted was a stockbroker. He was wiped out in the crash and never recovered from it. He not only lost his own money but that of hundreds of small investors as well. Some of them blamed him for their losses. He finally reached the point where he couldn't face it any more. He moved up here from Boston about three years ago and he's been alone ever since."

"Were you one of his investors?" I asked.

She gave me a sad smile. "No. I was his wife."

It was my turn to be shocked. "You were divorced?"

Faith Deveroux nodded. "It had nothing to do with the crash. I met Glen Deveroux early in 1929 and we fell in love. I told Ted I wanted a divorce a few months later. I was sorry when I heard what happened to him, but it had no connection with me."

"You're up here now without your husband?"

"Yes. He's a construction engineer working on the new Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Sometimes he's out there for months at a time. I got lonesome, so I came up here for a week."

"Did you know your former husband was living here?"

"I knew he was in the general area."

"Did you phone him when you arrived?"

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By this time her patience had worn thin. "What are you, Mr. Hawthorne, some sort of detective? What's the meaning of all these questions?"

"I'm a doctor. I've had some experience with crimes of this type and I thought I might help the local police."

"What do you mean, crimes of this type?"

"The circumstances seem somewhat bizarre, even impossible. Mr. Shorter was stabbed while he was alone in a cabin surrounded by unmarked snow. The killer couldn't have entered or left once the snow stopped before dawn. Yet there is no weapon pointing to suicide."

"Do the police suspect *me* of killing him?" she asked.

"I don't think at this point they're even aware of your existence."

"I'd appreciate it if that continued to be the case, Dr. Hawthorne. I assure you I know nothing of my ex-husband's death. We dined together the other night and that was all."

There was nothing more to be learned just then. I thanked her for her time and went to my room, where I sat by the window and tried to recall the details of the dead man's cabin. It was one large room with a sleeping loft and a small kitchen area. An outhouse was located at the rear. There had been some books, mainly about business and the stock market, and the remains of breakfast, confirming that Shorter had probably died after dawn. I wondered if a man would make breakfast if he intended to kill himself—and decided that stranger things had happened.

I didn't see April until after dinner. Then she seemed happier than I'd ever seen her.

"Have you been with Andre all day?" I asked, thinking I was making a joke.

To my surprise, she nodded. "I really like him, Sam. We had dinner in his office, just the two of us."

"This is getting serious," I said.

She changed the subject. "Do you have any leads on the killing?"

"Nothing much. I met a woman here at the lodge who turns out to be Shorter's former wife. It's interesting that she should be on the scene at the time he died, but she swears she knows nothing about it."

"Why would anyone kill a man who lived by himself in the woods?"

"I don't know. He lost a great deal of money in the crash and so

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did a number of people whose investments he handled. Perhaps one of them followed him up here for revenge."

"After more than five years?"

"It's happened before. Sometimes the anger at a supposed wrong will build in a person's mind until it blossoms into a homicidal rage. Shorter may have been here in hiding from just such a person."

We strolled out around the lodge, and the conversation shifted to Northmont and the people there. April spoke of it with something like nostalgia, as if remembering the home she'd left long ago. The conversation bothered me, and later in my room I sat for a long time at the window, staring out at the snow and the few lights that reflected off it.

Once I saw a figure moving, passing beneath one of the lights. It was Gus Laxault, carrying his shotgun, perhaps on the trail of another bobcat.

In the morning, April was gone from her room when I knocked at the door. I went down to breakfast and avoided joining Faith Deveroux, who was seated alone on the other side of the room.

April appeared as I was finishing my coffee. "I'm sorry I'm late," she said a bit sheepishly.

"That's all right. We're both on our own up here. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes."

"How about a walk, then?"

"Sounds good. Where to?"

"I was thinking of taking another look at Shorter's cabin."

"Won't we need snowshoes?"

"I imagine Sheriff Petty's people have worn a path to the door by now. Let's find out."

We followed our route of the previous day, encountering deep snow at only one point. April sank in up to her waist and I had to pull her out. We were still laughing when we finally reached the top of the hill overlooking Shorter's cabin.

"I think someone's in there," I said. "The door's standing open."

It proved to be a bearded man in a fur parka, sent by the telephone company to remove the phone from the wall. "Guess he won't have any more need for this," he told us. "We don't like to leave our equipment around in an empty house."

"Did you know Ted Shorter?" I asked him.

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"Not really." He kept working as he talked. "Met him once when I came out here to string some new line."

"Was he alone?"

"No—one of the fellas from the lodge was here with him."

"Andre Mulhone?"

"No, a handyman who works there. Laxault, I think his name is."

"Gus Laxault." I thought about that. "Ever see any bobcats around here?"

"Sure, once in a while. Mostly they mind their own business."

After he'd gone, April and I examined the cabin. It was much as I remembered it from the previous day, except that now there was no warming heat from the fireplace. I stood by the chair in which Shorter had been found dead, looking in every direction for some clue I might have missed. "Any ideas?" I asked April.

She giggled, this lighthearted new April I'd never seen before. "You sound like Sherlock Holmes. All right, how's this? He stabs himself with a knife tied to a piece of rubber cut from an inner tube or something. When he lets go of the knife, it's yanked away out of sight by this long rubber band."

"Where out of sight?"

April looked up and pointed. "Through that skylight to the roof."

It was just crazy enough to have happened. I moved a sturdy table over, placed a chair on top of it, and was able to reach the skylight. It opened easily, but the snow on the roof appeared unmarked. I felt around the edge of the window but there was no hidden knife.

I climbed back down to the floor. "Nothing up there," I said.

After replacing the furniture, I looked up the chimney, remembering a story I'd read about a weapon pulled up a chimney after a suicide, but there, too, I found nothing. I tried to reconstruct the events of the previous morning, talking as much to myself as to April. "He got up, probably shortly after dawn, and fixed breakfast. He started a fire, either before or after breakfast."

"Maybe the killer started the fire," April suggested, "to keep the body warm and confuse the time of death."

That was a possibility I'd overlooked. "But that still doesn't tell us how the killer got in and out," I said.

"During the night, before the snow stopped."

I shook my head. "You're forgetting breakfast."

"The killer could have faked that."

"But there's still the fire. It would have died down if it was unattended for that long."

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"I suppose you're right," she admitted. Then her eyes fastened on something on the floor near the door, almost hidden by a scatter rug. "What's that?"

It was a slim gold lead-pencil with the initials *G.D.* engraved on its side. "Maybe it's a clue," I said, though I doubted it. Sheriff Petty's people wouldn't be likely to miss it. Perhaps one of the investigators had used it to draw a map of the cabin and dropped it. I put it in my pocket and looked around the room. "I guess we've done all the looking that makes sense, April," I said.

As we walked back to the lodge, April became serious. "Sam, what would you do if I left you someday to take another job?"

"Probably close up my practice and become a monk."

"No, seriously."

"You've been with me thirteen years, April. As long as I've had my practice. Aren't you happy? Do you want more money?"

"It has nothing to do with money."

"I thought you were happy. You've certainly been happy the last couple of days."

"Yes."

"Then, what—"

"Andre's asked me to stay up here."

I was dumbfounded. "He offered you a job?"

"He wants to marry me."

"April! You'd marry a man you met only two days ago?"

"No."

I sighed with relief. "That's something, anyway."

"But maybe I'd like to stay here a while longer, to get to know him better."

"His wife was killed in an auto accident last year. He's just lonesome."

"So am I."

"What?"

"I'm thirty-nine years old, Sam."

"I never thought of you as wanting—"

"I know you didn't." There was a new note of sharpness in her voice. "Sometimes I've wondered if you thought of me as a woman at all."

I didn't want to talk about it any more. "We've got a few more days here," I said. "Let's just see what happens."

That night after dinner, I joined Faith Deveroux at her table for

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a little sherry. "I'll be leaving tomorrow," she confided, "going back to Boston."

"You're not staying for Shorter's funeral?"

She shook her head. "He hasn't meant anything to me in years. I was foolish to come up here at all."

I saw April standing in the doorway, looking around the room. When she saw me, she waved and headed for the table. "What is it?" I asked, standing up to greet her.

"Can you come with me? Andre thinks he's solved the mystery. I want you to hear it."

"I'd be happy to."

Faith Deveroux was on her feet, too. "May I come?"

I introduced her to April and we both followed along to Andre's office. He was seated behind his desk and seemed surprised to see Mrs. Deveroux, but he quickly offered her a chair. "You must excuse me, Mrs. Deveroux. I wasn't aware Ted's former wife was a guest here. I have a theory about his death which seems to fit the facts, and April thought Dr. Hawthorne should hear it."

"Go right ahead," she said.

"If you can explain how he was killed in that cabin with no tracks nearby except those of a wandering bobcat," I told him, "I'll certainly be interested in hearing it."

Andre nodded. "It's so simple I can tell you in one sentence. Ted Shorter stabbed himself with a dagger of ice, which promptly melted in the heat from the fireplace."

Faith Deveroux and I were silent, but April was quick to praise the theory. "That's the sort of thing you'd come up with, Sam! I just know it has to be right."

"April—" I started to say, and then directed my remarks directly to Mulhone. "Have you ever tried cutting the skin with a sharp piece of ice? It's not as easy as it sounds, even outdoors. Indoors, next to that fire, it would be impossible. What happens is that the edge of the ice, no matter how sharp it is, immediately begins to melt and grow dull." I turned to Faith. "Would your ex-husband have gained anything by concealing the fact of his suicide?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. After the divorce, he turned in his insurance policy for its cash value. He told me after he moved up here that there was no one who needed his insurance money."

"I still think your theory is possible, Andre," April insisted.

"No, Dr. Hawthorne is right," Mulhone said graciously. "I hadn't

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thought it through. I suppose I was trying to dispel the notion of a killer at large in the area."

Later, as I relaxed over a billiard table in the lodge's game room, April sought me out. "Sam, I want to talk."

"All right. In the bar?"

"I'd rather go upstairs."

I took her to my room and relaxed in a chair while she sat stiffly on the bed. "Now tell me what's troubling you," I said, dreading what might be coming.

"You hate Andre, don't you? Ever since I told you about us."

"You're wrong, April."

"What is it, then?"

I felt drained of energy. What I was about to say was the most difficult thing I'd ever done. "We have to face facts. Shorter's death wasn't a suicide, and certainly that wandering bobcat didn't kill him. No one entered that cabin between the time the snow stopped and we entered to find him. No one could have. The windows were latched and the snow at the door and on the roof was undisturbed."

"But—"

"Ted Shorter was alive when we entered, perhaps dozing by the fire. Andre, the first one to reach his chair, stabbed him when he bent over to shake him. That's the only way it could have been. I'm sorry, April. —Perhaps he lost money with Shorter's firm some years ago."

"No!" She threw herself down on the bed and sobbed, beating at the spread with her fists. There was nothing I could say or do. I'd said too much already.

I slept badly that night, but I finally dozed off near dawn and awakened with a clear head. My brain seemed to have been working even while I slept, and I had a fresh grasp of the situation that hadn't been obvious before. I lay in bed for a time, staring at the ceiling, then finally got up and telephoned Sheriff Petty. I told him what I wanted to do, without explaining why.

"It may be too late, Sheriff, but I'd like you to go with me to Shorter's cabin. This morning."

"What for?"

"I'd rather not say until I'm more certain."

"Don't tell me you believe that old chestnut about the murderer returning to the scene of the crime."

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"Something like that," I admitted.

I met him there shortly after eight o'clock, having suggested he leave his car out of sight on the main road. There had been no further snow, so we were able to enter the cabin along the well trodden path without leaving new prints. Once inside, I suggested we take cover in the sleeping loft.

"Who are you expecting to come?" Petty wanted to know.

"I'd like to wait to see if I'm right. There'll be plenty of time for explanations later."

But as the hours dragged on, I could see the sheriff's patience wearing thin. "It's after ten o'clock, Dr. Hawthorne. I have other duties, you know."

"Give me one more hour. If nothing happens by eleven, we'll call it —"

Below us, the cabin door started to open. I touched Petty's arm, warning him to silence. A man I'd never seen before entered and began looking around the floor. "Who—?" Sheriff Petty started to whisper, but I squeezed his arm, tensing myself to leap out of the sleeping loft.

I landed not six feet from the searching man, bringing him up straight with a look of surprise on his face. "Is this what you're looking for?" I asked, holding out the pencil April and I had found the previous day.

He looked at me oddly, then reached out his hand. "Yes, it is."

"Sheriff," I called out, "you'd better join us!"

An expression of panic crossed the man's face and I thought he might try to flee, but he stood his ground. "What's going on here, anyway?"

With Petty at my side, I felt a surge of confidence. "You dropped your pen yesterday morning when you were wearing your false beard and posing as the telephone man. You had to remove the phone wires before we figured out how you got into this cabin without leaving tracks. Sheriff, I want you to arrest this man for murder. He's the husband of Shorter's ex-wife. His name is Glen Deveroux."

I had to explain it all to the sheriff before he took Deveroux away, and then later, back at the Greenbush Inn, I told April and Andre about it. Faith Deveroux, shocked by her husband's arrest, had gone to the county jail to be with him.

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"I'm sorry about last night," I told April at the beginning. "My mind wasn't functioning right."

"We understand," Andre said. Obviously he'd heard the details from April.

"Glen Deveroux is a construction engineer, supposedly working for long periods on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Apparently he mistrusted his wife and would sneak back to Boston to check up on her. This time he followed her up here, wearing a beard for disguise, and found her having dinner with her ex-husband. Maybe they did more than have dinner. Posing as a telephone lineman, Deveroux went to Shorter's cabin and strung a couple of thin steel cables—the sort he uses in bridge construction. From a distance they looked just like ordinary telephone or electric wires. They were so much a part of the scenery that we never noticed them as we approached the cabin, but they had to be there. The cabin had electric lights and a crank telephone. I suppose our attention was diverted by the bobcat tracks."

"You mean," Andrew asked, "that this man walked across to the cabin on the telephone wire?"

"On a steel cable," I corrected, "with another steel cable to hang onto. Not a difficult task for a bridge builder. Once he reached the roof, he lifted the skylight and entered that way, lowering himself with another length of cable. When Shorter encountered him at work, he wasn't alarmed because Deveroux had visited him before in his guise of a telephone lineman. Deveroux stabbed Shorter and left the way he came. Any tracks he might have left on the roof would be easily smoothed over and the wind would finish the job of obliterating them."

April had a question. "If Deveroux met Shorter on a previous visit to the cabin, why didn't he simply kill the man then? Why go to all this trouble?"

"Because Shorter wasn't alone the first time. Gus Laxault was with him. Deveroux used this method in the hope the death would be taken for suicide. But he was so anxious to get out of there, he forgot to leave the weapon."

"How do you know this, Sam?" April asked. "Last night you thought Andre was guilty."

"I remembered the sunshine coming through the skylight when we entered the cabin to find the body. There wasn't time for all the snow to have melted from that glass, even with the heat from the cabin. Remember it was a cold morning. There was no snow on the

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skylight because it slid off when the skylight was opened. It wasn't latched like the windows. In fact, it opened quite easily. I asked myself, If the killer came through the skylight, how did he reach the roof?

"The wires, those unseen but necessary wires, were the answer. But could telephone and electric wires support the weight of a man across that distance? Not unless they were special wires, especially anchored on either end. When the lineman was there, removing the phone not twenty-four hours after the murder, I had to suspect him.

"Then there was the matter of the pencil. It had the initials *G.D.* on it, which could have stood for Glen Deveroux. It hadn't been dropped at the time of the murder or the police would have found it. If it didn't belong to Sheriff Petty or his people, it must have been dropped by that telephone man. If the phone man was Glen Deveroux in disguise, everything fell into place, including the motive. This morning, I took a chance he'd come back to the cabin, looking for his pencil."

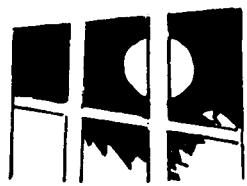
Andre stood up when I'd finished and shook my hand. "We owe you our thanks, April and I."

She kissed me on the cheek. "Can you ever forgive me for the way I behaved last night?"

"If you can forgive me." I looked at my watch. "I think I'll be starting back today. What are your plans?"

"I'll stay for the rest of the week, Sam. Then I'll come back to help train my replacement. You deserve a month's notice after all these years."

"April and Andre were married in the spring (Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded). Of course, I hated to see April go, but they were happy together and had a fine marriage. I was the godfather for their child. Things didn't go as smoothly with April's replacement, though, as I'll tell you next time."



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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

If you are a regular reader of EQMM, you know we occasionally experience coincidences in material we receive from contributors. Here's a new one—stories from two "second story" authors with some strong similarities in plot but which are as different as day and night, light and dark . . .

TO HIS CREDIT

by JAMES G. HOLDING

I watched my little brother dig a hole and crawl into it. It could have been his grave. He dug it with credit.

What was hardest was that I knew he was doing it. I'm a banker. I manage a middle-sized branch here in town and I've seen it happen to lots of people. They start to borrow and everything's fine. Then they borrow more. And more. We bankers make it easy. One day they wake up and the rain is pouring and the cars aren't in the garage and there's a deputy at the door with a writ of foreclosure and the wife and kids are crying and there's absolutely nothing you can do. Legally.

With Bobby, it started out simply enough. He was a hustler, a real
hustler. He'd started his own business right out of college, working as a printing jobber. He'd sell to businesses, banks, manufacturers, retailers, churches, anybody at all who used printed forms, then he'd get them what they needed cheaper than his bigger, better established competitors. He even made his own deliveries. What he lacked in expertise at first, he made up for in service. After he learned the ropes, his profit margin skyrocketed. He was a man on the rise.

Then he got married.

Not that I blame Margo. Don't get the idea that she was some

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kind of gold digger or spendthrift. She and Bobby were just two young kids starting out in life together, and they needed things.

I set them up with a mortgage for their new home, a personal loan to furnish it, and an auto loan for the new car they'd garage beside the van Bobby used for the business. In each case, I thought they were buying a little above themselves, but I don't make bad loans, not even for a brother. Bobby's debt-to-income ratio was strong enough to support each loan. They wouldn't be living on easy street, but what newlyweds do?

Margo and Bobby were fine at first. Then the mail started coming in. As newlywed homeowners with a decent income, they were on every hot-prospect list for every customer-hungry credit-card company and bank in the western hemisphere.

I hate to admit it, but my bank was the first.

You've gotten the mailings, I'm sure. The friendly banker sends you a nice letter telling you you're such a good person that the bank has pre-approved you for a line of credit and all you have to do is fill out a few boxes on the handy application and sign your name and you're on easy street. Or the credit-card company writes that you impress them so much they've given you preferred status, your own high credit limit, and if you mail the enclosed reservation card your fancy-colored plastic ticket to nirvana will be sent by return mail.

Most people get these come-ons and chuck them in the trash, which is what they deserve. (Remember this is a banker telling you this.) The trouble was that Bobby and Margo didn't. They sent in for every one they were offered.

Until a card gets used, it doesn't show up on a credit report. Bobby and Margo had good credit, so they got all the cards they asked for. And they used them.

They literally went credit crazy. Whatever they wanted, they got. It was instant gratification, just like you see on television.

Bobby and Margo had a great ride, but when it was over they were looking at a mountain of debt even Bobby's successful business couldn't help them climb.

Then along came home-equity lines of credit. You've seen these babies, too. We good old bankers will help you get even more credit by giving you a checking account that's actually a loan against that part of your home that the bank doesn't own. Read your newspaper—you'll see the ads offering to help you "tap" the value of your home and get the things you want in life.

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By this time I'd learned about Bobby and Margo's credit-card mountain. It was hard for me to miss the purchases and the lifestyle. I counseled them to take out a line of credit and consolidate their debt at a lower interest rate. (Check that rate out sometime—it's about twenty percent and you probably don't know it.) Then, I told them, chop the credit cards into pieces.

They followed half my advice.

Their home equity vanished the day they received their supply of checks. The card balances were wiped out, but Bobby and Margo still had the cards and they had the habit and they just couldn't let the good times stop rolling.

They were as addicted to credit as I am to smoking and I had as much luck trying to counsel them as all those quit-smoking programs have had with me. None. I tried, though. Since my divorce, Bobby's all the family I've got and he's my little brother to boot. I argued, I pleaded, I begged, I bullied, I came close to violence more than once. Nothing.

Finally, it was all too much. They reached the point where there just wasn't enough money to make the payments—and, suddenly, the friendly financial institutions weren't so friendly any more.

Bobby woke up to just how bad things were when I had to talk to him about bankruptcy. My bank was pushing me to foreclose and to repossess everything in sight. The card people were as nasty as only they can be. There was no way out, and realizing that made Bobby's life hell.

I wanted to help, but aside from advice there was little I could do. Don't believe all you hear about bankers making big bucks and being rich, especially when their ex-wives have lawyers as good as mine has.

The wolves began howling at Bobby's doorstep when suddenly things turned around. He sold his business. As a printing jobber, his assets were mainly his customer list and goodwill, but selling them let him stave off the various legal actions and gave him a breathing space.

Then he started making payments—big ones—and the world started looking rosy again. The money seemed to be rolling in. His debts went down and his savings actually grew. I found out that he was working as a traveling field representative for the National Credit Corporation. Bobby was a little vague as to what the company did other than that it dealt with banks, but I was too happy for him and Margo to push for answers . . .

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Six months or so after he'd taken the new job, I was in the local library. Just for something to do, I tried to look up some data on the National Credit Corporation. I checked all the standard business references, Dun & Bradstreet, Standard & Poor's, the Thomas Register, all of them. As far as I could find, the company didn't exist.

Back at the bank, I fed Cindy, my secretary, a story about a possible commercial loan for National Credit and asked her to run a detailed credit check, using our computer system. An hour later, she was back, embarrassed at not being able to find anything on the company in any credit data-bank in the country.

Bobby was on the road, so I had to wait several days to see him about it. I felt worse and worse as the time passed, wondering what he was doing to make so much money and worrying like a big brother.

It turned out he was robbing banks.

I had to work to get the truth out of him, but Bobby never could keep anything from me if I really wanted to know it. By the time we'd finished talking, he was in tears and I was close to it.

My little brother was robbing banks. I could hardly believe it. Oh, he wasn't taking a gun and a sack and sticking up tellers. Anybody in or around banking knows that's just a quick ticket to prison for chumps.

Bobby was doing it with paper. Deposit slips, to be exact.

I told you Bobby's business was printing. As one of his services, he'd gotten checks printed for his customers. To print checks, he'd had to learn how they work.

He'd learned well.

Take a look at your checks. You'll see a line of funny-looking numbers printed along the bottom of each one. Check printers put these numbers on the paper electronically as well as with ink, using a process called "micro-encoding"—or "MICRing" for short. The numbers tell electronic check-reading machines what bank and which account inside the bank the check is drawn on. When you cash or deposit a check, it goes into a check-clearing process in the bank and the Federal Reserve Bank System. Along the way, electronic check-readers read the MICRed numbers and the check amount, allocate funds from one account to another (or from one bank to another), and eventually credit or debit the amount of the check to its proper account. With several billion checks floating through the system each year, everybody relies on these automatic check-readers.

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Deposit slips are MICRed, too. They go through the system just like checks. The thing that Bobby relied on is that the electronic readers credit or debit the accounts by reading only the micro-encoded numbers *no matter what actually appears on the check or deposit slip.*

The key to Bobby's scam was the blank deposit slips that banks place so conveniently in their lobbies. They carry no micro-encoding at all. Normally, they're treated as exceptions; the system kicks them out and they're processed by human beings. Bobby beat the system.

As a field rep of National Credit Corporation, Bobby would fly into a major city, one with lots of banks and lots of branches. He'd usually arrive on Wednesday and open checking accounts at several of the city's major banks, using cash for his opening deposit and a phony name. On his way out of each bank, he'd swipe a goodly supply of blank deposit slips from the check desk in the lobby. Back at his hotel, he would use the portable micro-encoding machine he'd purchased to MICR in his new account number on the blank slips.

After rising late on Thursday, he'd spend a leisurely day traveling from branch to branch of his new banks, salting his encoded deposit slips in among the normal blank ones.

Friday, of course, is payday for many people. Saturdays are pretty hot in the banking world these days, too, and some banks do business on Sundays as well. The unsuspecting public would do their normal banking, many of them using Bobby's doctored deposit slips to make their deposits. The bank tellers would read what the customers wrote on their slips and would credit the customers' accounts accordingly. When the deposit slips got into the system, though, the check-reading machines would read Bobby's micro-encoded numbers and zing! The money would be credited to Bobby's account and not the customers'.

After a weekend of sightseeing, Bobby would call the bank to get his balance of available funds, which were, thanks to the scam, often vast. On a final visit to the bank, Bobby would cash a check for that amount and head home with another successful sales trip behind him.

Of course, the bank would find they'd been taken in time. The original depositors would bounce some checks because their money went to Bobby instead of to their account and raise a stink (customers can do that very well, believe me) and the bank would backtrack

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the transactions to Bobby's account. By then, though, Bobby would be long gone.

I went cold, hearing Bobby tell about it. I went colder still when I heard the total amount—more than two hundred thousand dollars in six short months. Stealing from a bank, in case you didn't know, is a Federal offense. It also drives bankers and the F.B.I. into a blood frenzy. I had visions of vendetta-bent, clean-cut young men in three-piece suits hunting Bobby down like a dog.

Maybe it's because I was so obviously scared that I had so little trouble talking Bobby out of his life of crime. He was far, far ahead of the game overall, and he seemed actually relieved to make me a solemn promise about bank robbery and credit both. I took his micro-encoder and hid it in a safe-deposit box in my branch's vault the next morning. It's been there untouched ever since.

So, okay, you're saying I helped Bobby commit a felony—a series of felonies. Wouldn't you? I admit it. I aided and abetted after the fact in a Federal crime, one whose victims were in the same business as me. But he's my little brother and my only living blood kin. I'm not sorry I did it, and I'd do it again.

That all happened nine long, nervous months ago. Nobody from the F.B.I. has shown up at Bobby's door. No one has called. I guess the scam was as good as Bobby had figured.

Bobby started his business back up and he's doing well again. Last month he and Margo had a baby boy. They named him after me. As far as I know, the pair of them have stayed on the wagon as far as credit goes. I can't monitor their cards, of course, but they make their loan payments dead on time. Their credit rating is even looking better.

As for me, I wrote a memo to Mr. Cassidy, the bank president, about the risks involved in leaving blank deposit slips in our lobbies. The slips got moved behind the teller line and customers have to ask to get one. I got a load of brownie points and a fair-sized bonus for that.

Mr. Cassidy was so happy with me, in fact, that he's agreed to let me take my six weeks' accumulated vacation as a series of long weekends. I'll be sightseeing in several major cities and I'll probably use some of my spare time to check out the local banking facilities.

If the vacations turn out well—and they should—I plan to resign my job and hit the road permanently as a field representative of the National Credit Corporation. Those alimony payments are murder.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

A tale of two couples—one in the deepest of trouble, the other in a position to help, to the degree that help is possible . . .

THE THIN WHITE LINE

by JAY A. COHEN

In the dark, the bedsprings squeak and Nancy Burroughs, feigning sleep, feels her husband sit up and ease himself to his feet. She listens to his clumsy tiptoeing as he crosses the creaky wooden floor, pictures his bulky frame descending the narrow stairs leading down to his basement workshop, hears the *clunk-snick* as he closes and locks the door. And though she knows by now that it will do no good, Nancy in turn rises and goes to sit at the top of the steps, to stare down at the thin white line of light seeping out under the locked door, the door that, for the first nineteen of their twenty years of marriage, had always been open, held against the wall by a bucket of miscellaneous bolts.

She sits and stares and wonders what, *what*, is he *doing* down there, what must he hide from me?

In a broad sense, she knows the why—the reason for the change in Lee. The chronology is clear. First the plant had closed, and Lee had gone confidently in search of another job, sure in the value of his skills and experience, only to run into a long line of sorry-but-we're-looking-for-someone-younger rejections. That was when he started to wake in the night, to pace, to eat—then to disappear into the workshop, and eventually to begin locking the door.

She has asked him, of course. "Lee, honey, what are you doing down there in the middle of the night?" And seen him go red, seen his eyes fill with guilt, seen in the rugged face she has come to know so well a new expression—fear. Seen that Lee is afraid to trust her with his secret. This hurts and so she doesn't ask again.

She wonders if it's sex. Her new job is long-houred and demanding,

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she rarely has energy for enthusiastic response, let alone seduction. Does he have a cache of dirty books down there, she wonders—did it start with that? Does that explain the other changes—the new clothes, the sudden interest in exercise, money spent unexplained, *hair dye.* The trips. One long weekend, one a full five days. The looking-for-a-job trips that brought him home still jobless but with a certain light in his eyes, a certain aliveness that he hadn't had in a long time. Born-of-frustration debaucheries? Or worse, another woman, someone else's wife? Nancy has read in magazines about the insecurities of middle-aged men, and Lee is a handsome man, there would be no shortage of ladies willing to console and reassure him, ladies who do not pay his bills. Nancy can almost understand, perhaps even forgive, if only he would come and tell her—trust her to understand, to forgive. Stop it, she tells herself, stop it now. Lee *wouldn't,* you *know* he wouldn't.

She remembers another time, when she was insecure herself, and foolish. A rumor made the rounds and she'd listened and suspected and accused, and in her mind she can still see Lee's usually stoic face radiating pain, still hear him say, "My God, Nance, if we don't trust each other, what's the point? I mean, if we don't have trust, we don't have anything, do we?"

And he was right, she knows he was right, but still she sits at the top of the stairs, peering down at the thin white line and wondering, and it is like a slow poison oozing through her veins.

Lee locks the basement door behind him and switches on the light. Rows of polished tools gleam back at him. The room smells of oil, a touch of sawdust. There is a small bookshelf filled with technical references, a pair of sturdy workbenches joined at right angles, cubbyholes for nuts and bolts and odds and ends that, you never know, might be useful sometime.

And in a place of honor on the wall are two ornately framed, enlarged photographs of Nancy and himself, one of them both dressed for the wedding, the other of Nancy alone, wearing the red-satin dress bought on their honeymoon and worn, with occasional help from the seamstress, on every anniversary. Upstairs there are other family pictures—their two grown daughters, relatives—but down here only these two.

Lee stands a moment looking at them and he thinks of turning back, denying Its call, but he knows he will only return later, he might as well get it over with now. He crosses to the workbench

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and, reaching underneath, pushes on what appear to be knots in the wood but which give to his pressure. There is a click and he slides the secret panel back. He undoes the straps and the slim black case falls out into his hands. He sets it on the bench, works the lock, and opens it. The pungent aroma of gun oil rises up to greet him and he feels the adrenaline begin to surge in his veins.

With quiet little snicks and clicks, he puts the rifle together, the tripod, the telescoping stock, the powerful scope mounted on top. It has taken him six months of diligent daily work—innumerable versions of each part designed and discarded, a first model made and tested and adjustments made, all the time telling himself it was just a hobby, just a little technical problem to keep himself busy, but knowing all along that he would have to use it, that it wasn't an end but a means, a tool. But a beautiful tool, gleaming, efficient, and precise, born of his own mind and hands, a sleek power that is his and his alone.

He makes doubly sure the chamber is empty, then sets the gun in place on the workbench and crawls up behind it, caresses the cold metal, touches the trigger lightly, puts his eye to the scope, and remembers, *relives*, feels again the rising excitement tinged with the euphoria of power.

He sees again the fat man on the golf course, his sagging face bright red with sunburn, laughing and talking, the other three of the foursome laughing along while the caddies, straight-faced and weary, carry the clubs, set up the tees, even drive the carts. Amazing that the fat man hits the ball himself. But he does and, leaning back, eyes shaded against the sun, his wide belly provides the perfect target.

In the basement, there is a metallic *click*, but Lee hears the flat *crack!* of the 30.06 shell exploding, the whine of the bullet winging hot and hard like his own rage. It's like reaching out to tap the fat man on the shoulder, saying, "You can't live like this, no sir, not while I rust away."

Through the scope he sees the fat man jerk and fall, and for a moment he feels again the moment of triumph, the surging certainty of the importance of his own existence—and then it all fades and he is alone in his basement, cradling the gun, remembering how the fat man twitched weakly, flopped, and went still, and he, instead of standing to give a Tarzan yell of victory, had to run like a criminal, sprinting back on the carefully planned route, to change his clothes

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and run again, and hide at last here in his workshop, beneath the ground, in a hole.

Where he sits now and stares at the wall and knows he has destroyed no behemoth of corporate evil, but merely a fat man who was born lucky enough and smart enough and mean enough to make it to the top, to the exclusive club where the million-dollar bonuses are handed out—but who can be replaced quite easily the next working day. Except, perhaps, in the lives of his family. And Lee knows his act was not a triumph, but the gnat-bite of a defeated man—and that he wants nothing more than to take this beautifully crafted tool into his mouth, taste the lovingly applied oil, pull the trigger, and end it all.

Feeling the suicidal urge grow stronger, Lee hurriedly rushes to put the gun away, to run upstairs, to stand in the bedroom doorway, pausing a moment to slow his breathing, staring through the gloom at the dim shape of his wife. Wanting terribly to go to her and tell her all about it, knowing she would hold him, listen to him, understand him. But that is the problem, for Lee is ashamed and doesn't want to be understood—not by Nancy, not by anyone. He only wishes he himself did not understand so well.

And Nancy, lying still, her heart still pounding from her sudden flight back to bed, hears Lee cross the room and smells his nervous sweat as he settles down beside her. She lies still, with tears welling in her eyes, acutely aware of the tension in their bodies, the cautious distance between them in the bed.

She thinks of all the other times they'd had problems, in twenty years there must be problems, but sooner or later they had sat down and worked them out. But she knows that somehow it's different this time, that it won't be enough to simply wait until the right moment to bring it up. She thinks, If only I knew what it is he's doing, it would be all right, we could work it out. Whatever it is. If only I knew.

Nancy walks hesitantly along the sidewalk, shivering a little in the early-morning cool. She pauses a moment, glancing furtively at the big panel of dark glass bearing the legend *Fowler & Fowler, Confidential Research and Inquiry* in dignified gold letters, then moves on, thinking, No, private detectives are for TV, for make believe, for scum, not for ordinary people, not for me.

But if she could just *know* what it was he did on those trips and in the basement. She turns back, approaches the door, pauses again,

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thinking, No, I can't do this to Lee—and the door opens and a short, dark-haired girl wearing a business suit and a wide smile says, "Ma'am, I'm Juanita Fowler. Would you like to come in?"

Nancy is caught off guard and can only stare as the woman adds, "It's all right—most people are nervous about consulting a private inquiry service, but really there's no need to be."

Nancy breathes in, trying to take control. "No, it's not that—I'm just not sure I can afford— How much do you charge?"

"Nothing just to talk. And of course anything you tell us is quite confidential. If you do decide to hire us, the fee is negotiable, depending on the work you want done. Would you like a cup of tea? I've got some jasmine brewed. Or some coffee? My husband is a fiend for it, so we've plenty on hand."

So Nancy Burroughs finds herself inside, sitting in a wonderfully comfortable chair, bathed in the steam rising off the aromatic tea, with the pleasant young woman in the chair beside her—and, perched on the corner of a huge desk, a stocky young man who smiles and tells her his name is Water Fowler. He scratches idly at his close-trimmed beard as he listens intently to practically her entire life story. There is an air of relaxation in the room, the Fowlers so obviously at ease with each other and the relief at finally being able to talk to someone overwhelming her original intention to be as discreet and anonymous as possible.

"I just need to *know*," she tells them. "I used to think if he ever, you know, cheated on me, I'd kill him—but now, after all these years, if we could just sit down and talk about it, we could fix it, I know we could. Lee and I are good at fixing things. But he must never know about you, about—"

"Of course not," Juanita says.

"Believe me, ma'am," Water says, "he'll never know we were there."

"How much will it cost?"

"Well," Water says, and Nancy watches him look at his wife, watches the understanding flow, and remembering how it used to be that way with her and Lee she turns away.

"Tell you what, ma'am," Water says, "for two hundred dollars plus expenses we'll make a few random checks on your husband and, if you'll give us a call the next time he's going on a trip, we'll find out where he goes and what he does. It will probably cost two-fifty, three hundred all told. Can you manage that?"

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"We can take it in twenty-dollar installments, interest free," Juanita says.

When Nancy has gone, the Fowlers leave what they refer to as the Showoffice and retire to the ordered chaos of the back room. Water drains a cold cup of coffee, refills it with hot, and settles down crosslegged with the newspaper, grumbling, "Ten more like that and we'll pay the rent. *If* they pay us."

"I don't think it's another woman," Juanita says. "I suspect he's tired of being out of work and is trying his hand at some out-of-town burglary."

"Yeah, well, you always try to see the best in people. What I want to know is, how come nobody ever comes in here and says, 'Here's ten grand, I want all the dirt on Mr. Fat Cat—it's time the world learned the truth about this crook.' That would be my idea of an interesting case."

"Maybe we don't advertise in the right places."

"Like this Lippincott," Water says, rattling the paper. "Remember a couple of weeks ago he was teeing off and somebody shot him with a 30.06? Naturally, the cops were a little curious as to the reason for this somewhat hostile act and started poking around—and found that Lippincott was vice president in charge of sneaking toxic waste out the back door at Manion Chemical and got an eight-hundred-grand bonus last year for being so good at this noble work. Now that's the kind of fellow I'd really enjoy investigating."

Lee Burroughs hadn't intended to get drunk—he had just felt the need for a little shot of bourbon to help him calm down—but then this girl had come in. She was on the short side, with brown, very sympathetic eyes, and she wore a light-colored blouse which she filled admirably. Lee felt a guilty twinge, but told himself it didn't hurt just to look, a man could dream a little, and Nance would never know—it wasn't as if he was going to do anything but talk.

But it is indeed pleasant to sit with this young woman and sip chest-warming whiskey and talk of the old days when the plant was open, the machinery roaring, and the men busy putting together the great combines and balers and corn-shuckers. It had been Lee's job to keep the conveyor belts rolling. All the machines that made the machines, from the forklifts to the robot paint sprayers, were his duty and his pride. It was no fault of his that the plant had shut down—the men with the wide, cold smiles and the puffy white hands

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were the ones who had failed, who hadn't done the job, but they weren't the ones who couldn't find jobs now, who were considered too old, who had no specialty. Who had to stay home and live off their wives.

As he tells this young woman of the numbness he felt when the plant closed, and of Nancy's anger at his despair, he wants to tell her the rest, about the gun, and the power and the shame, but he feels the thickness of his tongue, and his drunkenness frightens him. He thanks the girl for listening and takes himself home, thinking, That was close. You'll do Nance no good if you get caught. You're sick, Lee. You've got to stop this madness.

"Water," Juanita says, "it's so sad."

"I know." He drops his arm around her shoulders and gives her a little squeeze. "What is?"

"Mr. Burroughs. You'd like him. You know what he does all day?"

"No."

"He sits in the library and reads newspapers and business magazines." She goes on to tell him of the one-sided conversation in the bar, of Burroughs' scarred fingers clenched in frustration and the despair in his voice.

"Yeah, well, why doesn't he go to night school, or go freelance? There's no shortage of broken machines."

"He's up to something," she says. "He was going to tell me something, but he caught himself. I still don't think it's a woman."

In the front office, the telephone rings and Water goes to answer it. When he comes back he says, "Mrs. Burroughs. I'm off. I'll take the motorcycle. You type up the Marshall report and that insurance thing and—"

"Go," she says.

The phone rings in the office of Fowler & Fowler and Juanita picks up and says, "You're late."

"I'm in a different time zone," Water answers. "In Denver. When I get back, there are parts of me that are going to need an expert masseuse."

"Oh? And those parts are?"

"Me bod and me ego. I lost him. He went into some office building that has fourteen back doors, twelve side exits, and an ejection seat with a parachute on the roof. I gave orders for the building to be surrounded, but since there's only me he managed to slip through.

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—He's definitely up to something—he changed clothes and hair color in the bus-station restroom."

"Now what?"

"Guess I'll hang around the bus station, see if anyone kisses him goodbye."

The gas flame roars over their heads and the balloon fills steadily. Roger and Lorraine Lanham lean against the side of the basket and look up at the always impressive rise of the Rocky Mountains. Roger sighs, already feeling some of the tension ease away. To his taste, there is nothing better than a long balloon ride to rid the body of its poisons.

It has been a poisonous year for Roger—long days, long weeks. As V.P. for Labor Relations at DMET Corp., it was his job to crush the strike. It had been a long, hard battle, but he'd won, and now there's a handsome bonus deposited in Roger's various accounts and no union at the plant. His name is now well known in the business press, he is receiving offers for consulting work—and there's time for Lorraine and a long ride in the balloon. The ropes are cast off and slowly they begin to rise. He takes her hand, and as she gives it a little squeeze something smacks against the basket.

Roger starts, says, "Hey, what was that?" and stands still a moment, puzzled, and then abruptly he's on his back, vaguely aware of a great pain in his chest, looking up into the guts of the colorful balloon and at his wife's wide eyes and screaming mouth. Then Roger Lanham is dead.

In what the Fowlers call their Backoffice, a weary Water pours a cup of coffee and settles gingerly down onto the sofa. "Well, Burroughs is back, on the bleeding overnight bus all by his lonesome. For two hundred dollars I'm doing this—two hundred."

"Gives you a nice warm feeling, though, doesn't it?"

"Sure. Right up the back of my neck." He leans forward and starts to peruse the morning newspaper Juanita has set out for him. It doesn't take him long to spot the item. "Oh oh," he says. "Get the Burroughs file, would you, and look up the dates of his other two mysterious trips?"

When Juanita reads out the first date, he digs into a file marked "Misc. Crime of Interest," nods, and says, "Williamson, Tri-Court, Inc.—30.06 in the chest." She reads a second date. Water digs, nods, and says, "Lippincott, on the golf course—30.06 in the chest. And

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yesterday, Lanham, in Denver. The committee for what the hell do we do now is hereby called to order and will entertain motions from the floor, ceiling, and off the wall."

The lock clicks, the door swings open, and Water reaches up with one black-gloved finger and flips the light on. Looking around, he says, "Neat, isn't he? This shouldn't take long."

Forty minutes later, he looks with exasperation at his wife. "There's got to be *something* that brings him down here at three in the morning."

"Maybe he polishes his crescent wrenches."

"Yeah," Water says, drumming his fingers impatiently on the workbench, "but why lock the door?" He drums his fingers again. Stops. Drums again—thoughtful, listening. "Wait a minute," he says and crawls under the workbench. Exploring the bottom carefully with his fingers, he then pushes at the knots in the wood. They give and the panel slides open. "Of course," he says, "silly of you to miss this."

Removing the case from its hiding place, he sets it on the bench and works on the lock until it opens. "Well, now," he says, "I think we could call this a preponderance of the evidence."

"That poor woman," Juanita says.

"Mrs. Burroughs? Yeah, well, seems to me she's just lucky he's not mad at *her*."

"Water, listen. I've got an idea. You said yourself those guys he killed were bastards—"

"No," Water says, "I don't even want to hear it. The man's over the line. You don't just haul off and shoot people because you think they're nasty—there are rules against that."

"I practically went out and dragged her in."

"*Somebody* would have caught him sooner or later," he told her. "Sooner is better."

"I know, I know—but I can't help feeling we owe Nancy *something*."

"All right," Water says, "how about if we do it this way—"

Lee Burroughs stands at the top of the basement stairs and looks down into darkness, into himself. He can still hear the faint sound of the woman's distant, anguished scream, and yet It is already calling to him, already he wants to touch and hold the gun, to plan again—without a plan there is nothing to do but wait to die.

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It's gone too far, he thinks, I can't stop now, not alone. In his mind he pictures a psychiatrist's quiet office, the man himself bearded, white coat. Doc, he says, I killed these three people, but I want to stop now. Can you help me? Sure, Lee thinks, sure.

He starts as he hears Nancy call to him from the bedroom. "Lee, would you come in here a moment, please?"

As Lee turns to obey, an irrational anger fills him. Why does she have to say please—why is she always so good to him? If it wasn't for her he could kill himself in peace. End of problem.

He goes to the bedroom and stops suddenly as he sees she is wearing the satin dress, the red anniversary dress, and staring at him with such intensity he can almost feel the touch of her eyes.

Her hand, when she comes forward to take his and lead him to the bed, is trembling. "What—?" he says but stops when he sees tears starting down her cheeks.

"Lee," she says, her voice husky and quavering in a way that seems to wrap her words around his heart, "I love you—I want you to know that, no matter what. I love you, you are my life." And then she reaches under the bed and pulls out the black case and opens it on the bed. On top of the gun is the newspaper article detailing the three deaths. Lee shivers as coldness creeps over his skin and he sits down on the bed, mute and staring, as Nancy takes his head in her arms, pulling him to her and stroking his hair and the strong muscles in his neck. "Tell me about it now," she says.

He starts to try, but sobs overwhelm him and he cannot speak.

When he is finally able to stop crying and tell her about it, sitting side by side on the bed, the anger, for the first time in over a year, is cooled. It is still there, but for now, it is bearable. Nancy sits holding him, filling the empty spaces inside her with the knowledge that, bleak though the future may be, they will face it together, as one again.

And then the door opens and she looks up and watches Water cross the room to take up the gun and the hidden tape recorder. And behind him Juanita stands in the doorway, questioning her with her eyes. And Nancy answers with her own moist gaze, saying, "Yes, thank you, it is better this way." And to Lee she speaks gently, saying, "It's time to go now, love."

And he nods and rises and slowly they leave the house, with Juanita holding the front door open for them and Water shutting it behind them with a quiet click.

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a *NEW* short story by

MARGARET MILLAR

In the letter accompanying this story, literary agent Phyllis Westberg of Harold Ober Associates wrote: "It's been a long time since Margaret Millar has written a short story so I'm very pleased to send 'Notions' for your consideration. I hope you love it." You bet we do.

The author's latest in paperback (from International Polygonics) are Fire Will Freeze *and* The Iron Gates . . .

NOTIONS

by MARGARET MILLAR

Miss Porter had some strange notions. Many of us do: they wander in and out of our heads, leaving little or no impression. Miss Porter's were more persistent, impervious to time and reason. She was convinced, for instance, that a certain bluejay which frequented her feeding station at the rear of her townhouse followed her whenever she left the premises to go to the grocery store, the doctor, the bank, the library. It waited, she claimed, on the parapet of the library roof, on the telephone pole outside the doctor's office, on the water-maiden fountain in front of the bank, or on top of the oak tree planted in the center of the grocery-store parking lot. When Miss Porter returned to her old Lincoln, she would snap her fingers to alert the bird to her departure, and drive home using the same route every time.

I wasn't surprised that the jay or any other creature could recognize her car. The Lincoln was distinctive not only for its age and size but because the roof had been painted white to reflect the sun's rays and keep the interior of the car cool, Miss Porter having no use for air-conditioning. In addition to its rakish roof, the Lincoln carried

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an Indian radiator cap once used on Pontiacs. Miss Porter had gone to considerable trouble to acquire the Indian radiator ornament, corresponding with the main Pontiac officials in Michigan and, on their advice, canvassing various used-car lots and junkyards. She finally purchased one for fifty dollars at a swap meet, explaining to the swapper that the reason she wanted it was because she was one-ninth Indian. How she arrived at this unlikely figure no one knew, but to give it some authenticity she wore her hair long and black and straight. The rest of Miss Porter must have come from the other eight-ninths of her heredity. She was short and plump and pink.

There are always rumors about the very rich. Many of them start with a seed of truth which then grows wildly in all directions but straight. One of these rumors concerned Miss Porter's elopement at the age of fifteen with a Mexican gardener. Three weeks later she returned home in the company of a couple of burly men hired to find her. The fate of her lover remained in doubt. There were several versions: he had accepted a bribe to get lost; he had been killed by one of the two burly men; he was arrested after a bar brawl in Ensenada. The story Miss Porter told was different. She had repeated it to everybody she knew, swearing each to secrecy, without changing a detail. Her lover, Ramon, broken-hearted, had flung himself off a cliff into the sea and drowned.

"He was devoted to me," Miss Porter said. And I was, in spite of myself, rather touched, though it was long ago and far away and may never have happened.

The bluejay was also devoted to her, or so it seemed. There were numerous bluejays in the neighborhood, all of them the same size and shape and color, the same brashness of manner and loudness of voice. I couldn't tell if it was the same bird who came every day and perched on the railing of Miss Porter's deck, bobbing and weaving like a fighter at the sound of the bell. Its raucous demands brought Miss Porter scurrying out the back door with a handful of peanuts. She talked to the bird. If the air was still and my windows were open I could hear an occasional sentence.

"Now, now, is it nice to be so greedy? No, it is not nice. And that voice of yours. Why, it's enough to wake the dead and kill the living. Oh, oh, what a hungry boy you are."

Sometimes one of her sentences was punctuated by a little cry of pain when the bird's beak jabbed her flesh instead of a peanut.

She was a good sport about it.

"Just a touch of blood-poisoning," she said when I met her one day

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in the library and inquired about her bandaged hand. "My little bird gave me a love peck."

"It was probably unintentional."

"My dear child, you don't know much about love pecks," she said with a little laugh. "They are always intentional."

About three months after I moved out from Chicago and rented the house next to Miss Porter's, she invited me to drive over the pass into the Santa Ynez Valley to pick olallie berries. I'd never heard of olallie berries but it was a pleasant day for a drive and I had nothing better to do.

Most short elderly women look overwhelmed behind the wheel of a huge car, but Miss Porter seemed right at home and in full charge. She drove skillfully around the sharp precipitous road up the mountain, pausing every now and then to look over at a tree or shrub with the binoculars she kept on the seat beside her.

"Oh, dear," she said finally, "I feared this would happen, I really feared. But there was nothing I could do to stop it."

"Stop what?"

"Blue Boy is following us."

And so he was. Or so it seemed. Every time Miss Porter braked the car and pointed at a toyon, a manzanita, a scrub oak, a bluejay would be perched on top.

"He will be exhausted," she said. "The trip is much too long for him."

It had been a rainy spring and the valley was lush and green and the lake was blue as jays. We turned off the main road into a lane marked by a hand-printed sign, OLALLIES, PICK YOUR OWN, $4 PER BUCKET. At the ranch house, we were each outfitted with a plastic belt with a bucket fastened to it.

"We will just take our time," Miss Porter said. "That will give Blue Boy an opportunity to rest up for the return trip."

By noon, the day had turned hot and the sun was relentless. My head felt as if it had been put in an oven and taken out medium rare. Miss Porter filled her bucket before I even reached the halfway mark. My fingers were stained purplish red and covered with painful little scratches. We paid for the olallie berries, which were then transferred to plastic bags. On our way back to the car, Miss Porter stopped suddenly.

"Where's Blue Boy? I don't hear him. Do you?"

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"No."

"I must find him and tell him we're leaving."

She plunged into a wild blue sea of sky flowers toward the place on the telephone pole where we'd last seen Blue Boy. He lay almost directly underneath in a tangle of burr clover.

Miss Porter turned away, covering her eyes with her hand. "Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"The trip exhausted him," she said. "It wore out his brave little heart. He loved me enough to die for me. He died of devotion."

I didn't point out the two small round holes in the bird's breast, nor did I draw attention to the boys with the BB guns we passed on the main road.

"There will be other birds," I said.

"No. Not for me. When Ramon died, people said there would be other men. But there never were."

"Birds are easier to replace."

There were other birds, of course, all the way home, many of them jays perched on scrub oak and toyon and manzanita, all exactly alike, the same color and size and shape, the same brash manners and raucous voices. Miss Porter did not acknowledge them.

When we reached home, she silently handed me both bags of olallie berries with an expression of revulsion on her face as if the berries had gone bad and she wanted to get rid of them.

This is how I remembered her during my month-long trip to Chicago on family business. When I returned home, my first job was the usual stocking up on groceries. Miss Porter and I met at opposite ends of the delicatessen counter. She waved at me merrily with her right hand. The left was heavily bandaged and supported by a sling made of a silk scarf.

"Another love peck," she said brightly. "Would you believe it?"

I said I would.

"What a surprise it was to come out on the deck and find Blue Boy waiting for me. He wasn't dead after all. He had merely fainted from exhaustion. When he regained consciousness we were gone, and it took him several days to get home without my car to guide him. But lo and behold, there he was, good as new." She took a step closer to me and lowered her voice. "It makes me wonder about Ramon."

"How?"

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"Perhaps he didn't really die when he jumped over that cliff. Perhaps he is, right this minute, working in someone else's garden. He will have changed considerably by this time, but I would still know him—the way I knew Blue Boy." She shook her head as if trying to dislodge an idea. "Of course it's not likely we'll meet again. But it's a lovely notion, isn't it?"

I had to agree. It was a lovely notion.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies the body of William Hill,
Known to his buddies as Bigmouth Bill.
The reason that Bigmouth died so young
Was simply this: a wagging tongue.
Bill loved to talk—at the drop of a hat,
He'd talk your arm off on this or that,
Telling you more than you wanted to know
As his spate of verbiage would overflow.
Well, Bill was a petty thief by trade
And liked to talk of the scores he'd made
And chat with his friends of *their* coup d'etats
While robbing and stealing and breaking the laws.
But an undercover cop one day
Listened to what Bill had to say,
And smiled and arranged for the quick arrest
Of four of the friends that Bill liked best.
So the other cronies of Bigmouth Bill,
Fearing what else poor Bill might spill,
Shot him and buried him in this spot
Where he now keeps quiet as you know what.

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a *NEW* Jojo Lorraine story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Hank Pennyquick had told Jojo a fascinating sidelight on Dave Disgrace.

"Grew up two doors down the street from me in Bermondsey," he recalled. "Never had the bottle to be an honest thief like his brothers. They're all pickpockets—family trade back to Queen Vicky's time. I can always wind our David up by calling him 'prestigious' in my column. I always do, notice? Many people aren't aware of the fact, but that doesn't only mean prestige—its first definition is swiftness of the hand. Deftness, as in sticky fingers . . ."

JOJO AND THE FISH-HOOKS POCKET

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Willie Ablard had no earthly right to be as popular as he was. Fat, elderly, more than a bit of a bore, Willie's most irritating failing was that he hadn't done a stroke of work in decades yet had money to spare for his hobbies. Never for loans, though, the story went—a selfish, worthless old buffer, really.

Yet people liked seeing him at first nights. Regulars made room at the Dress Circle bar while strangers wished they knew him, engaged by Willie's innocent pleasure in a single glass of champagne. He'd inherited money and made more in his industrious youth, but Willie Ablard's true wealth lay in being enormously likeable.

Jojo was upset to learn, vaguely and at fifth hand, that Willie was at death's front gate, if not the proverbial doorstep. To make it worse,

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she was touring in the pre-West End run of a mild disaster called *New Shoes*. Anxious cross-country phone calls to Willie's flat, just behind Harrod's in Knightsbridge, didn't soothe her. Miss Cook, his housekeeper, was snappish.

"He's perfectly all right considering—Mrs. Paxton." Miss Cook well knew that Jojo detested being addressed by her married name. For some reason connected with feeling her actual, top-secret age, Jojo considered Mrs. Paxton to be dirty pool.

"He's up and about again—well, will be any day now," Miss Cook reassured her, less than reassuringly. "What's that? I don't think it's any of our business—he's no spring chicken, leave it at that. Speak to him? Out of the question—but I'll say you asked after him."

"Silly old haybag," Jojo muttered. She *loved* being hung up on.

Then the new play came into London. Sample review headlines: JOJO'S SHOES PINCH and IS THERE A COBBLER IN THE HOUSE? (Moral: If you must get lumbered with a turkey, avoid the pun-begging variety.) Back at the heart of the gossip factory, she stopped worrying about Willie Ablard in order to be outraged. Word was that he hadn't been ill at all, but rescued from a determined suicide bid.

He wasn't the type, and if he was, things had gone terribly awry. Up with this, Jojo chanted in her head, I will not put! Her battle cry.

Despite Willie's reputation for stinginess, she knew better. He did good by stealth, that was all. He'd kept her at drama school when a financial crisis could have doomed her to an office or a shop. And she hadn't been his only protege. Practical kindness, without strings.

The morning after the first night of *New Shoes*—its last had to be only days away, hardly sweetening Jojo's mood—she parked outside Gartwell Mansions. The idea was to slip in as soon as Willie's guardian dragon went shopping, a daily routine. Miss Cook foiled it by erupting from the lobby the moment Jojo's Rabbit ragtop pulled up.

"I've been watching for you—knew you'd be round soon as ever you could. Not like his fair-weather friends. Go straight up," Miss Cook babbled, "I left the door ajar. He refuses to see anyone—but you're different."

To Jojo's astonishment, horse-faced, sergeant-majorly Nola Cook sobbed explosively, "I thought he'd get over it and we could fool

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everyone, but he's fading away!" And staring ahead, tears dripping off her welterweight's chin, Miss Cook strode away.

Willie Ablard was not fading away. Outwardly, physically, he was all present if not quite correct—tie carelessly knotted, shoes unbuffed—but Jojo could tell what Miss Cook had been getting at. For Jojo knew her friend's tastes in flirtatious window shopping and had dressed to cheer him up. Far too showy for daytime, but she disdained rules and mere conventions had no chance. She was poured into a dress, cunningly cut to make a bra redundant, the skirt slit to the hip.

Ominously, Willie didn't get out of the armchair to greet her, just nodded mutely. Jojo perched on the broad arm of the facing chair, crossing her legs. Willie managed a wan smirk and sighed, "Oh, dear." Her heart sank. The arm was hard, her ploy a failure, so she got up again and sat down properly.

Before she could speak, Willie murmured, "I'm not up to it, Jojo. Meeting people, conversation, explanations, anything."

"I'm not people, you mutt," she said sternly. She leaned forward. Generally, the pleasing spectacle of her bosom displayed like oysters on the half shell worked wonders. "Oh, dear," Willie repeated.

It took Jojo half an hour to get any sense out of him. Then she heard an extraordinary story—given her certainty that Willie Ablard was neither crazy nor a thief.

A month before, he'd attended one of Lady Bellarmin's charity affairs, a lighthearted celebrity regatta on the Thames near Hampton Court. Trish Bellarmin had been a show girl and loved throwing parties, raising money for theater-world causes their pretext. Willie Ablard never missed them.

"I was leaving," he told Jojo, "when this young chappie, um, drew me aside. Most discreet, no complaints there. Oh, dear—complaints! *I'm* the one in the wrong."

There was a lot of this—Willie couldn't give coherent evidence to save his life—but Jojo can be stubbornly patient. Gradually she learned that the discreet young man had been a detective constable on duty at the charity party. He'd asked Willie if he'd mind turning out his pockets, and, more intrigued and amused than offended, Willie hadn't thought twice about agreeing.

"It was in the breast pocket of my blazer," he whispered. "The inside pocket. As soon as my fingers touched it, Hello, I thought,

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what on earth is this? God, what a *nightmare*. I could have dropped on the spot. *Awful*. I'd taken poor Trish Bellarmin's cigarette case! You've seen it—Busby gave it to her before they got married. Exquisite little thing, ivory with gold inlay."

Inwardly appalled, Jojo refused to seem anything of the kind. "Okay, gasp, gasp, shock-horror-drama," she monotoned. "Trish offered you a cigarette, passed the case, and when you'd taken one—" She tailed away, scrapping the rest of her not wholly honest claim to have done exactly the same thing with friends' pens or lighters. Willie Ablard was a notorious and militant non-smoker.

He nodded, masochistically pleased. "Exactly, my dear. And Trish gave it up last year. The cigarette case had been on her dressing table, so this policeman chappie told me. And he'd seen me coming out of her bedroom. Or thought he had. I'd gone up to the cloakroom on the second floor and he was down on the landing, so he jumped to a wrong conclusion. —Only it turned out to be the right one."

"Back up," Jojo ordered crisply. "You had been into her room or you hadn't—which is it?"

Willie Ablard sighed and shrugged. "I *hadn't,* of course. Why would I? Not done. But the *case* had been in there and then it was hidden away in my blazer. I walked *past* Trish's bedroom on my way back outdoors to the party, that's all. I'm *sure* I never went in." He clasped his head. "I don't know any more!"

Putting an arm round his ample shoulders and squeezing, Jojo crooned, "I do."

Willie, like his housekeeper, started crying. "It was awful, awful," he kept sobbing.

"All right," Jojo ventured, "so what was the outcome? Trish wouldn't make a song and dance about it."

"She doesn't know!" Willie turned furtive, as if Lady Bellarmin might be in the kitchen, eavesdropping. "Detective Constable Hunter put it back for me. I persuaded him it was a—God knows what—bizarre freak, a momentary breakdown. He was a decent laddie, could tell I'm not the sort who'd—" He shuddered, unable to finish.

Curiouser and curiouser, Jojo told herself. Downright weird. Deliberately bracing, she said, "Okay, you got away with it. So what's all this nonsense about taking to your bed and turning into a hermit?"

"I don't want to talk about it." Willie's weak jaw set, his treble

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chins wobbling with emphasis. "To find oneself a thief! At my age! Disgrace, scandal, gossip columns—"

But he did talk about it. Because after a long, brooding pause for thought, Jojo demanded, "Apart from nicking the famous cigarette case—and I don't believe a word of that, incidentally—what else has cropped up, just before or since that happened?"

Willie goggled at her.

"Anything out of the ordinary," Jojo prompted. "Trust me, darling—just rack your brain. You could no more be a kleptomaniac than I could be celibate. You didn't steal the thing. There's more to all this—mischief, malice, wheels within wheels."

Willie continued to goggle, thought about it, and, slowly, started to talk.

"A few days after Trish Bellarmin's party, Detective Constable Hunter came here to the flat. He was in a terrible state—agitated, hangdog. He told me he'd exceeded his authority and was facing disciplinary action—his superiors were furious with him. I should have been arrested and charged with theft.

"Hunter said he was off the case and I'd probably be interviewed by other policemen. He was warning me in case I needed a solicitor standing by, didn't want me caught off guard in a sense of false security." Willie gestured vaguely. "That's part of what makes it so rotten. Hunter's a decent boy and I've blotted *his* copybook as well. When he left, I took—" Willie fell silent, unable to meet Jojo's eyes. "That was when I was taken ill," he amended at last.

Hurrying past the awkwardness, Jojo asked, "Did the police take action? I doubt whether they'd have a leg to stand on."

Dismissing that, Willie mumbled, "Please, you're so persistent, but none of this matters any more. Don't misunderstand me—I mean the thing has blown over. Been made to blow over." His small mouth pursed on some bitter medicine. "Grace blew it over, as it were. David Grace."

"Dave Disgrace?" Rarely for Jojo, surprise made her squeak. David Grace was a sharp lawyer who dabbled in show business. Forever about to put money into productions and never delivering, but luring strings of green, aspiring actresses onto his casting couch. As a sideline, he was middleman to the viler Fleet Street scandal sheets, selling lurid confessions involving obscure "starlets" or "models" and prominent celebrities.

Jojo said, "What in the world is the link between you and Dave

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Disgrace? He's a non-starter in the human race, darling—I thought better of you."

Flustered and sheepish, Willie snapped, "It's a business connection, if you must know. That's how it started, at least. Everyone's too hard on Grace—success attracts envy, give a dog a bad name. He wanted to buy the Regency and he couldn't do that without my shares." He swallowed, avoiding her gaze once more. "I refused at first. Silly sentiment—my grandfather built that theater. But it's been closed for years, an eyesore, past repair." He seemed to be quoting—the assertion lacked any conviction. "But then Grace contacted me again. Somehow he'd heard about my, um, predicament. He was quite indignant, as a matter of fact. A comedy of errors, he called it. He said he could fix it."

Jojo, greenish eyes ablaze, growled, "I bet he did! Oh, Willie—and I suppose you've sold him the shares, yes?"

"No, I have not!" Peevishness gave way to shamefaced honesty. "Not yet. But I must, Jojo. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise Dave Disgrace could unfix what he fixed. Willie, you aren't safe out on your own. I'm sorry, but it's true—he set you up."

"That has crossed my mind," Willie responded drily, "since. But I wasn't thinking straight, I was in despair. And it's too late now—things have gone too far. My dear, I dare not offend him. If this scandal were to leak out, I couldn't bear it, I'd rather be dead."

"Just promise you won't do anything about selling those shares until I've had a shot at sorting things out," Jojo said.

Willie balked at that instantly. A lovely man, but a terrible coward. Guessing his worries, Jojo said, "Dave Disgrace won't spread any gossip while there's still a chance of him buying the Regency. What you do is run away. You need a holiday, darling. Get your passport and I'll pack."

Miss Cook, arriving to hear the suggestion-command, seconded it at the top of her voice. In the end, Cookie packed while Jojo hit the phone to her travel agent. Hardly two hours later they drove Willie to Heathrow, and as far as London was concerned he vanished.

New Shoes closed ten nights later, to Jojo's perceived humiliation and covert relief. She had a lot to do before Willie Ablard got back from his hols.

Jojo, her critics (overwhelmingly female) will be unsurprised to hear, is not the least religious. By the same token, she doesn't believe

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in blind coincidence. Whatever happens to one, in her book, whatever one hears, is there for a purpose.

In the spring of 1983 she'd had A Little Something Going with Hank Pennyquick, who runs the Watchman column in *The Lantern,* that cheap-shot, half smart, irritatingly well informed tabloid newspaper. Hank had told her many things, mostly lies or patent impossibilities—such as claiming that Jojo's eyes changed color at certain tender moments or that proportionally, her legs were longer than a giraffe's neck and prettier, too.

He told her so much that something in there was bound to be useful one day. Such as a trivial, meaningless yet fascinating sidelight on Dave Disgrace. "Grew up two doors down the street from me in Bermondsey," Hank Pennyquick recalled. "Gutless little bastard, never had the bottle to be an honest thief like his brothers. *They're* all pickpockets—family trade back to Queen Vicky's time. I can always wind our David up by calling him 'prestigious' in my column. I always do, notice? Many people aren't aware of the fact, but that doesn't only mean prestige—its first definition is swiftness of the hand. Deftness, as in sticky fingers. Bit of an in-joke, that."

Jojo has never had A Little Anything with Superintendent Charles, but then he is firmly married and a lay preacher to boot. However, when a policeman was shot and injured around the corner from her then-theater in 1981, Jojo organized and starred in a concert raising badly needed money for the victim. Mr. Charles owed her one, such as answering questions without asking why.

No, he told Jojo, there was no Detective Constable Hunter in the Hampton Court division, or the Met police or Surrey force, for that matter.

Trish Bellarmin, pumped, confirmed that no police had been on duty at the charity regatta. Jojo had expected nothing else.

The man in Patti's Bar, where alcoholic thespians have been known to pop in for between-scenes bracers, it being a covert jog from at least seven West End theaters, had a face like an uncooked sausage. Pale, over-stuffed, minimal features, shiny.

Uncooked or no, the sausage was sizzling. David Grace couldn't believe his luck. That snooty cow, Jojo Lorraine, had the next stool and—okay, the place was packed but she *could* have swivelled the other way and instead her knee was nuzzling his hip as he stood jammed against the bar. "Hi, there," Disgrace wheezed, the silver-

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tongued charmer. She'd snubbed him in the past, but he could always pretend he was talking past her.

"Hello, darling." Dear God, she was smiling. At him. Warmly. With a perfect eyebrow raised in invitation. Dave felt six feet tall if not ten. He cast a swift, circling glance around—gratified that plenty of folk could see he'd cracked it with Jojo Lorraine.

And then— His eyes watered and he squealed in shock and pain before understanding that she'd slapped him. And his head was wet, soaking, worms were crawling down inside his collar—*she'd emptied a Bloody Mary pitcher over him!*

"What's the problem, Miss Lorraine?" Patti of Patti's Bar isn't Patricia but a far from girlish fellow called Angelo Patti, theater buff and retired wrestler. Gobbling with fury, Disgrace knew unfairness when he encountered it. Great muscle-bound slob asking *her* what the prob—

"This disgusting little creep put his hand up my skirt," Jojo announced. Not indignant, icily incredulous.

"I never—" David Grace howled, spraying saliva and vodka-impregnated tomato juice impartially.

Somehow, suddenly, Patti was on the customers' side of the bar and he was bigger when no longer half out of sight. "Nor never will again, not in my place," he told Dave, who retreated without wasting time in turning round. The bar was hushed, all eyes his way. The tale would be in Broadway cafes by the morning, let alone his London haunts.

At the door, he recovered his cool. Perversely, as a master of ambush, he almost admired her. "You," he told Jojo, "are a wicked bitch and I'll make you pay for that." Which was when Angelo Patti made sure he left the premises without touching the doormat.

It was a fine story and several people dined out on it. A few of them had been within a mile of Patti's Bar at the time, too. Obviously the incident was embellished with every telling, David Grace growing within days into a metropolitan folk myth—Superboor, a figure of derision.

Jojo didn't dine out on it. She didn't go out at all. After a week, friends were concerned. "I'm practicing being a nun," she informed inquirers. "You know, *hibernating*, darling." Whatever, she wouldn't budge.

Until one morning, after standing outside her flat in a reverie, a

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highly decorative, living statue, Jojo appeared to reach a decision and strolled the best part of five hundred yards to Fisgard's.

Fisgard's. The department store that's a world of its own, an attitude, a lifestyle, an—experience. It's smaller than Harrod's, but they try to make up for that by charging more for less. Lofty men stand around in tail coats and nobody knows what they're for. Jojo, terminal spendthrift and gift-buyer, airily dismisses this palace as "my shop around the corner."

Even the store detectives are special. Mrs. Tumelty, for instance, is an ex-officer in the Women's Royal Navy and, with her sensible shoes and hairy suit, seems eternally in search of the annual meeting of the Landed Gentry Wives' Association. Toward midday, an open-faced, quietly dressed, indefinably helpful young man approached her diffidently. "Excuse me, do you work here?"

"Why?" Mrs. Tumelty parried, wary though civil. Encouragement enough for him. The stillborn bow turned into heads-together confiding. Luckily, he used peppermint mouthwash.

"None of my business, mind, but I'm in retailing myself—nothing like as grand as this, only a little business, tobacco and confectionary and that—but it gets my goat when the public waltz in and think they have a free license to rip you off."

Mrs. Tumelty, listening noncommittally, waited.

"What it is, there's a bird—um, woman—over there by Perfumes, Lady Muck to the life, and she just leaned over, quick as a ferret up a drainpipe, and nicked something. I couldn't see what, but nothing's cheap in here and it's in her side pocket now, whatever it is."

When Mrs. Tumelty had located the customer, the helpful young man was no longer at her side. It didn't matter, because Fisgard's porters are legion. They nabbed him trying to slip out through the Goods Inwards bay.

"Detective Constable Hunter, I presume," Jojo purred. Pale and decidedly unhappy, the helpful young man had just been shepherded into Mr. Bowman's lair, a bunker hidden away in the bowels of Fisgard's. Mr. Bowman is head of security.

The helpful young man declined from thoughtful to haggard at Jojo's words. "Dunno what you mean. Never heard of him. You got no right to drag me in here."

"Every right," Mr. Bowman contradicted. "Before setting foot on these premises today, Miss Lorraine warned us about the stroke you

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might try to pull on her. As you did. My staff observed you purloining and hiding a £97 flask of perfume before sneaking up and slipping it into the side pocket of her sheepskin jacket."

Bowman grinned like a dagger unsheathing. "Not just down to the naked eye, either. We're state of the art here, we have video surveillance, it's all on Candid Camera. Big trouble is what you're in, Sunny Jim. Theft, and impersonating a police officer in the Hampton Court area a few weeks back. Not my business, that bit, but as an ex-copper myself it'll be a pleasure to pass you on to the proper authorities."

Young Helpful's eyes did a vintage Richard Nixon shuffle between the security man and Jojo, settling on her. "You'd sussed me from the off—you were waiting for me!"

"Well," she pointed out reasonably, "*you* were waiting for *me*, sweetie, keeping vigil outside my flat, ever since I clobbered your brother. Dave Disgrace *is* your brother, yes? There are supposed to be three of you, and Geoffrey's the youngest, so that must be you."

Geoffrey Grace groaned. "Serves me right for getting dragged into a private feud. Listen, folks, in this world we got to help each other, know what I mean? Let's talk this over, save the law a lot of needless fuss and bother—citizen's duty is that," he suggested, virtue personified.

An hour later and six miles away across London, Dave Grace's office door opened, triggering a snarling leer for the incomer. "Too late, gel. Want to apologize now, do we? Should have thought of that before you pulled a stroke on me. The rest of your life you'll wake up nights wishing you'd never tried making a berk out of David Grace."

"Oh, I never try to improve on nature's handiwork," Jojo replied demurely. "Calm down, celebrations are premature—for you. A boomerang by the name of Geoffrey Grace has missed its target and is about to hit you smartly behind the left ear."

The elder Grace's unpleasant expression congealed.

Sitting down, Jojo continued. "Despite my chic and *soigné* facade, I'm a country lass. Grampa farmed near Bridgewater, Somerset. He'd go to town on market days and have hundreds of pounds of cash on him by close of business. He never had a penny stolen."

"There'd better be a point to this."

"It's about to impale you, wretched little toad that you are. Grampa never lost money because he had his 'market coat' with

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special pockets—pockets with fish-hooks sewn inside. That way, he not only kept his money safe but caught the pickpocket."

The word galled her listener, as intended. Smiling sweetly, she went on. "Talking of pickpockets, they run in your family. That gave me an idea about how Willie Ablard got framed to your advantage. A pickpocket can be just as good at putting something where it *doesn't* belong as lifting it from where it does.

"So I wound you up, at Patti's Bar. 'Light the blue touchpaper and retire immediately,' as it says on the fireworks. Sure enough, you couldn't resist trying the same dirty trick twice. I stayed indoors until your secret weapon was desperate with boredom—then took him to a store where they knew what to expect and there was no risk of it working. You were counting on me to get prosecuted for shoplifting—headlines, scandal, a joking matter for TV comics and maybe my career down the drain for good luck."

Greasy face immobile, Dave Disgrace spoke with care. "Repeat a word of that elsewhere and I won't need to frame you, gel. I'll break you legally, with slander damages. We're discussing a hypothetical case—anyone hiring a pickpocket for the lunatic scheme you've dreamed up would pay the feller royally to keep quiet if he was caught. Yes, I do have petty criminals in my family but that's not a crime."

Jojo gave him a mockingly surprised glance. "Big money buys a crook and keeps him bought? And you a bent lawyer! Even I know better than that. Your baby brother didn't expect to get caught. You promised him that wouldn't happen, but it has—and he's *miffed*.

"Darling Geoff put his thinking cap on. Brotherly love and thieves' honor versus his spot of bother at the Perfume counter this morning, plus the fake policeman thing coming out, *plus* the certainty of drawing that suspended two-year sentence. Guess which way he jumped? When I left him with my chum, Mr. Bowman, your brother was dictating a statement, *très* lengthy."

"He wouldn't," Grace wheezed woefully.

"Grow up. I'm a valued customer at Fisgard's and they avoid featuring in squalid little court cases. Bad for the stuffy image. So we worked out a mutually satisfactory arrangement. Geoff isn't prosecuted, and in return he provides me with a full confession: what he was up to and who put him up to it. I've got to say Geoff loved the deal, said it would be dirt cheap at twice the price."

Eyes sunken, cheeks and forehead yellow, Disgrace thought aloud.

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"Wicked bitch doesn't start to cover it. I should have had you killed. No, just kidding!" he added hastily. "Can't you take a joke?"

"Only when I have the last laugh," Jojo said. "And I'm going to. Half the staff of Fisgard's know the score and brother Geoff's statement goes into my safe-deposit box. You, not a moment too soon, are going to turn over a new leaf. Or else."

Willie Ablard returned from the Canary Isles, health restored, and went back on the first night's circuit, able to meet Lady Bellarmin and ply her with small talk, conscience clear.

He didn't sell the Regency Theater, so Dave Disgrace never converted it into offices with a sex shop in the basement, and the place still molders peacefully, a blot on the West End. Disgrace donated £10,000 to theater charities and—perhaps there was no linkage—suffered a mild heart attack.

Brother Geoff was never seen nor heard of again, but should you find yourself next to a helpful young man in a crowded place check your purse or wallet. Not while he's looking your way, however—that tells him where to dip.

Jojo's next play had nothing to do with shoes in its title, yet managed to run—the pun's irresistible—for eighteen months. At the party to mark its first birthday, Willie Ablard kissed her cheek and presented her with a fish-hook nestling in one of those cute and opulent boxes from the Court jewelers. The shank and barb were platinum and a diamond represented the hole for the line.

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A new histo-mystery reprint from Robert Henson, whose "Lizzie Borden in the P.M." in the January 1987 issue gave new possibilities to that strange real-life case and who here takes on Billie Frechette.

"Billie, Billie, Billie," Jax, the owner of the carnival, said, shaking his head, "you could go down in history as the one woman *in John Dillinger's life. But you know what's gonna happen? The Woman in Red's gonna take your place. Not the woman that stuck by him, but the one that sold him out! How could you let that happen . . . ?"*

BILLIE LOSES HER JOB

by ROBERT HENSON

When I came out of prison in 1936, a man named Jax was waiting at the gate to sign me up for a personal-appearance tour with his carnival: "Jax Shows—Pre-eminent in the Field."

I said I didn't have nothing to tell. "Besides," I said, "he's been dead two years."

"Oh, Billie," he said, "if I could just show you the newspaper clippings, the magazine articles, even the movies! Ever hear of this new guy, Humphrey Bogart? It's him right down to the grin! What's the biggest draw at the FBI in Washington, D.C.? His .38, the straw hat he was wearing, his sunglasses. John Dillinger's a legend, Billie, an American hero!"

I said it was news to me.

"The lodge where him and the FBI shot it out—Little Bohemia, remember?—that guy's got a gold mine, tourists beating a path up there just to look at the bullet holes!"

"I wasn't there," I said. "That's what I mean."

I was going to Neopit, Wisconsin, to visit my mother, then on to Chicago to find work. Inside I'd learned how to *do* something for the first time in my life, even if it was only cutting shirtwaist patterns. My supervisor told the parole board I was the best worker she ever

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had. But outside it was still hard times—especially for women, Indians, and ex-cons. How'd you like to be all three? When Mr. Jax looked me up again several months later, I'd left Chicago. I was back in Neopit.

He didn't have the look white men usually had when they knocked on a door on the reservation. He said, "I knew I was in the right place as soon as I saw that tepee." He meant the fake tepee refreshment stand for tourists that was in the middle of town. Indians were just show business to him.

"Actually, I'm only half Menominee," I told him. "Of course, it's the half that shows."

"You got a nice smile, Billie," he said. "You got beautiful eyes. I still want you to join the midway. People'd take to you if you didn't do nothing but smile and say, Hello, I'm Billie Frechette. Crowds are one thing I *know* about."

They'd been playing lots in Illinois for a month and were fixing to loop down through Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. "If you joined us now, you'd have a whole month before we start hitting the fairs and the big crowds. However," he said, "in case you're still hesitating, I've got this great big ace up my sleeve. Guess who you'll be on the platform with? John Dillinger *Senior!* Just signed!"

I couldn't think of what to say. We were sitting at the kitchen table, wind blowing straight through the house from front to back. My mother never closed a window from June to November. Mr. Jax looked at the wall behind me where there was an old calendar picture of Lindbergh in his aviator's cap.

"An American hero, Billie, just like Lindy!"

"I've met Mr. Dillinger," I said.

"All the better! Did you know he started going out two weeks after Johnny was killed! Vaudeville, midways, he's even given talks at Little Bohemia. Don't that tell you something? But *this*—his dad and his only true love on the same bill! We'll pack 'em in! Don't get me wrong," he said, "this here'll be an office attraction—that means my own personal management. It won't be no freak show, I promise you."

I wasn't thinking about that.

Sure enough, before we ever got to the fair dates, he called me in for a talk. "Billie, Billie, Billie," he says, shaking his head, "you could go down in history as the *one woman* in John Dillinger's life. But you know what's gonna happen? The Woman in Red's gonna

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take your place. Not the woman that stuck by him, but the one that sold him out! How could you let that happen?

"I'm gonna have to let you go, Billie," he says.

The way he used to shake his head and say my name over always reminded me of Louis Piquett, Johnny's mouthpiece. "Billie, Billie, Billie," he'd say, "Johnny wants to *marry* you! Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Well, he wanted to marry me as soon as he met me. I was working hatcheck in a nightclub in Chicago. The first time he come in he leaned across the counter and said, "Know something?—you got beautiful eyes." The next two nights we had drinks on my break. He said he was from Indianapolis and had to go back on business but he'd send for me if I'd come.

"What kind of business?"

He opened his billfold and took out some clippings from Indiana newspapers, all about a daring new bank robber who'd walked in with a straw hat tipped over one eye, announced a stickup, and then—instead of pushing open the teller's door—jumped up on the ledge and vaulted right over the cage.

"Why'd you do that?" I asked.

He said he didn't know why, he didn't even think about it—"All at once I was just flying through the air. Will you come if I send for you? I know we've just met, but, baby, I've fallen for you in a great big way. Say razzberries, but to me that means just one thing. I want to be with you forever."

He always did talk like a popular song. It wasn't what he *said* that made me go to Indianapolis a few months later. In fact, I told him right off that I was married and couldn't get a divorce because my husband had been sent up for fifteen years and I didn't know where. I gave Louis Piquett a standing order: "Find the louse."

Louis had contacts in every pen in the forty-eight states, but finding Sparks wasn't that easy. He told me in private it was hard to believe I didn't know where my own husband had been sent.

I said, "Well, he wasn't tried in Chicago, it was in St. Louis. So I couldn't be there."

"And he never *once* got in touch with you after he was sentenced?"

"I guess he was ashamed."

When I first met the man I married, I asked why everyone called

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him Sparks instead of George. He said it was because he was an electrician.

I was crazy about baseball in those days. On Saturdays, I used to hitch a ride into Shawano with my girl friend. Usually we'd just stand around, but if there was a baseball game that's where I'd be. He turned up one summer playing first base for the Shawano team. He was Menominee but he'd gone away to Haskell Indian School in Kansas, then did odd jobs around the country.

He took me to Chicago after we were married. There was supposed to be a lot of work for electricians because of the World's Fair coming up: "A Century of Progress." That sounded good to me. Next thing I knew, he caught fifteen for armed robbery.

A friend of his took me on at the nightclub. He was the one that changed my name to Billie, said it went better with Frechette. He used to tell people I was French and Indian—"French where you want her to be French, and Indian where you want her to be Indian." I was used to the jokes. Before long I had me a Persian-lamb coat and a long bob, and I'd learned how to cover smallpox scars with makeup.

Louis finally tracked Sparks down in Leavenworth and gave him Johnny's message.

"What're you telling me for?" Sparks says. "We ain't married. I didn't even know she was using my name."

"Billie, Billie, Billie, you've lied to me so much," Louis says, "trying to keep me from finding this so-called husband of yours. Why did you give me all those names—George Welton, Welton Sparks, George Sparks? Why didn't you just tell me to look for George Welton Frechette, nicknamed Sparks? Why did you let me think Frechette was your maiden name?"

"All I'm asking you to do is check on his story before you say anything to Johnny."

"All right, tell me again where you were married."

"Chicago."

"Not Shawano?"

"We stood up in front of a preacher in Shawano, then when we got to Chicago we went to city hall to make sure it was legal."

"So you were married in Wisconsin *and* Illinois."

"And one or the other's bound to have a record of it," I said, "if you just keep looking . . ."

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He always liked me, Louis did, but Johnny was the one he'd do anything for. He served time for the same rap as me—harboring a fugitive. I seen him just once after we both got out. He still looked like a kewpie doll with his big round eyes and round face. "I never told him, Billie," he said. "At least I spared him that." I couldn't figure out what he meant.

"He died not knowing that you could have married him *any time.*" Tears actually rolled down his cheeks when he said it.

Mr. Dillinger always introduced me as Johnny's wife—at least until he got sore and stopped introducing me at all.

"I first met the little lady *you're* waiting to meet," he'd say after his own talk, "back in April nineteen thirty-four. My son brought her to the farm. He had many women friends, so they tell me, but only two he ever brought to get his dad's blessing.

"I warned him against the first one. I said, 'That girl will not stick by you,' which proved correct, as he later admitted to me. But when he come leading this little lady by the hand—never mind state troopers watching the road and G-men watching the house—I said, 'She's the one for you, Johnny,' and he said, 'Dad, I'm glad to hear that because I want you to meet the sweetest little wife in the world—Billie Frechette!' "

That was my cue to step out on the platform.

He knew from experience what people liked to hear, but I never doubted he believed every word he said, especially if it was something Johnny told him. He was supposed to have been strict in earlier days. Wouldn't lift a finger to save Johnny from his first long stretch—wouldn't pay for a lawyer—wouldn't even go to the trial. Prison didn't change Johnny, except to make him a pro. The month he got out, he robbed ten banks in a row. It was Mr. Dillinger that caved in. He used to tell audiences, "My boy lived longer in forty minutes than I did in forty years"—something Johnny said once to a bunch of reporters.

I never knew my own father—he was gone before I had the chance. If I'd met him later, I wouldn't have cared two hoots in hell what he thought about me. Johnny was just the opposite. I couldn't get over the way he beamed when Mr. Dillinger took me around at a family reunion introducing me as "Johnny's wife" and "my new daughter-in-law." I was dying for a cigarette. "No—he don't believe

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in women smoking," Johnny whispered, nearly paralyzing my elbow with his thumb and finger. His sister Audrey had to sneak me out behind the barn. I was twenty-four years old!

There were relatives and friends from all around Mooresville at that reunion. Naturally, no one expected Johnny to show up—it hadn't been six weeks since he busted out of Crown Point jail with his "wooden gun," and the FBI had just promoted him to Public Enemy No. 1. But when he got word from Audrey that there was going to be a reunion, nothing could keep him away. "Fix yourself up," he says. "I'm taking you to meet my dad."

We drove down from Chicago a day early, got there just before dark. State police had the turnoff to the farm staked out, but he said he had a secret way to get to the house that he'd used since he was a kid. Nobody knew about it except him.

No wonder. We left the car on a back road, crawled through a barbed-wire fence, and started off through this maze of gullies and ravines, some so deep I could see tree roots over my head. He was carrying his tommy, so I had to carry the overnight bag. I was wearing a skirt flared at the bottom but tight around the hips, a blouse with a lace collar, bolero jacket, and high-heeled shoes with ankle straps. Fix myself up!

"The least you could've done was warn me to bring another pair of shoes," I said.

"Go barefoot."

The gullies were sandy but with a lot of little flat rocks. I remember thinking how tender my feet had got. Time was I could walk on cockleburrs and not feel a thing.

Mr. Dillinger nearly had a heart attack when he answered the back door, but right then, I'm sure, is when he took a liking to me. Not when Johnny got around to introducing me, but when he seen me following him barefoot.

State troopers and FBI cruised back and forth all the next day but didn't have no reason to come onto private property. There was just local people coming and going. Audrey and the others set up a big chicken dinner out back where Johnny could keep out of sight while everyone else let themselves be seen walking around and acting natural.

Afterward Johnny told everyone to gather around, he had a big surprise. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a wooden gun blacked with shoe polish. "Here it is, folks—the gun that locked up

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eight deputies and twelve trusties at Crown Point! Audrey," he says, "I'm turning this over to you. Don't you part with it for any price. Keep it and pass it on to your kids!"

For some reason, Audrey flickered me a glance. I was hoping I didn't look more surprised than anybody else.

They all got out their Kodaks and begged him to pose with the gun. He said he'd do even better. He went in the house and got his tommy. Mr. Dillinger stopped him on the porch. I don't know what he said, but Johnny answered in a voice *everyone* could hear, "This tommy's as harmless as that wooden gun. Sure, I keep it loaded, but I never shoot except to throw a scare into someone that's trying to shoot *me*. That's one thing you don't have to worry about, Dad. I've never killed a man and I never will."

That night I asked him where he got the wooden gun. He gave me a hard look. "Why?"

"Well, you never showed it to *me*."

"I made it in jail, just like I said."

"I don't think Audrey bought the story."

"Did she say anything to you?"

"No."

"Well, don't judge everyone by yourself."

Newspapers and public officials raised a terrible stink about that reunion. All those good people knowing the whereabouts of John Dillinger on that day, and not a one calling the law! He was still collecting newspaper clippings about himself. Only one thing bothered him—the way they kept referring to me as an "unidentified female companion."

"Now Dad will think I lied to him."

Mooresville people got their backs up at being called pro-crime. They sent a petition to the governor asking him to give Johnny a full pardon if he turned himself in. They said banks were as guilty as he was of taking people's money, only banks never got punished. They also said he wasn't violent, which was proved by the fact that he'd never killed a man. They wanted him to be given a chance to start over.

He was shook up by the petition. He said he'd written to some of the very same people at the time of his parole hearing, asking for letters of recommendation. "Not a fucking one answered! Now they see they were wrong—they want to make it up to me. They're good people."

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I said, "I guess you're going to turn yourself in, huh?"

For a second I thought he was going to punch me—he couldn't stand not to be taken seriously. But all he done was say with kind of a sneer, "Why don't you wake up, Billie—broaden your horizons." A remark I haven't figured out to this day.

Once down in Florida he beat me up so bad Pete Pierpont had to drag him off me. That was Christmas Day 1933. Two black eyes, kicked my leg so hard I could barely walk, busted my lip. Red Hamilton, Boobie Clark, Chuck Makley, and Pete were downstairs, them and their girl friends, having breakfast. It's funny Pete should be the only one to help me—his girl started the trouble, Mary Kinder.

She was a tiny little thing, but red-haired and mean. Johnny had gone down to the table and found his place wasn't set. In front of all the men, Mary said her and the other girls were tired of doing my work, said I never done my share, said she bet I was still putting on my makeup that very minute. Which happened to be true because of the smallpox scars.

I knew about how much good it'd do me to say that or anything else when he come slamming into the room, yelling at me to get my ass downstairs and fix his breakfast! I said, "Well, what are you having?"

"Whatever the others are having!"

"Well, I hope it's bread and gravy, because if there are drippings I can make gravy but that's all I know how to cook and I've told you that before."

"Then start learning!"—and he sends my makeup crashing to the floor.

I grabbed my long nailfile. "I'm not starting *anything* just to please those bitches downstairs, and especially that one bitch!"

He swung on me, caught me in the mouth. Twisted my arm to make me drop the nailfile. I went down on my knees to get it and he kicked me on the leg two or three times, hard. When I tried to stand up, I fell sideways on the bed. I went limp. I covered up my face with my arms and said, "Go ahead, show what a big man you are, prove you got power! The worst mistake of my life was to believe it myself!"

Then he begun accusing me of fooling around with someone else. That's what he always brought it down to. He never knew what I meant by power. "Tell me who it is or I'll kill you!"

So I said, "Charles Lindbergh."

He jumped on me like a mad dog, and I believe he would have

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killed me if Pete hadn't run in and stopped him. He was Johnny's best friend from prison, the only one he would ever listen to. Pete managed to get him out of the room into the hall. I didn't even care what they were saying, I was busy sopping blood from my lip with a wadded-up corner of the sheet.

Pretty soon Johnny come back alone. Didn't say a word. Grabbed me by the arm and made me sit up. Took my suitcase out of the closet and threw it on the bed, threw down a roll of bills. "Go back where you came from," he said, and walked out.

About an hour later I was limping down the stairs. Halfway down, I heard Mary sing out, "Come on, everybody, let's open our presents!"

They were standing around the tree when I went by in the hall—taking their cue from Johnny and pretending not to notice me. Just as I got to the front door, Pete broke away. He said, "Wait on the porch. I'll call a taxi."

I said in a loud voice, "Don't bother, I got a car," and I jingled the keys to Johnny's new Ford. He'd left them lying on the bureau.

Pete stood there like he was frozen. After a couple of seconds Johnny said, "Let her have it."

So I went back where I came from—Neopit, not Chicago.

I could be gone a year and my mother wouldn't act no more surprised than if she'd seen me the day before. She'd always say she was expecting me because of a dream she'd had. I used to tease her. I'd say, "Oh, you're getting just like Grandmaw!" She thought she'd turned her back on the old ways, but she believed in dreams to the point where she didn't even say she *dreamed* this or that last night, but this or that *happened* last night. She looked down on the people over at Zoar, where they still lived in bark huts and belonged to the Medicine Lodge. She turned Catholic, she married a white man, she wanted overstuffed furniture, linoleum, and running water in the house, like the people over at Keshena. Still, there wasn't nothing she liked better than getting together with her cronies to swap tales about love powders and witches. On State 47, Neopit's right in between Zoar and Keshna.

When I drove into the yard she said, "I knew it was you. I seen your face in the water last night, so I knew you'd be crossing Wolf River today." I said, "Oh, you dreamed that because you want running water so bad." She pretended to think for a minute, then said, deadpan, "I believe you're right, Evelyn, and I seen your face because you're going to pay for it."

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She was teasing me back. Other girls left the reservation and worked and come back with money to buy nice things. I usually showed up with nothing but the clothes on my back. This time, though, I had the Ford and the roll of bills.

I hadn't even counted it. She sat down and counted it first thing. Almost a grand.

"Well, it's all yours," I said. "Buy yourself a radio, get some furniture, have the front door fixed."

She acted uneasy. "I'll put it away and use it a little at a time." She wasn't worried about where it come from, only about being witched if someone got jealous.

A few days later, snow begun to fall. "What are you going to do with that car?" she said.

"Leave it where it is, I guess."

Made no difference to me if it was buried in the snow. It got me where I was going, I didn't have no more use for it.

She went and borrowed a tarpaulin from a neighbor. "*You're* the one that's like Grandmaw," she said.

Mr. Dillinger used to tell people that Johnny was just an average American boy except for not having a mother after the age of three. He said Johnny liked to read Wild West stories, especially about Jesse James. He admired Jesse for fighting railroads and the money boys back East. Jesse was the one, he said, that inspired Johnny to respect women.

While he was giving his talk, he used to hold up baby clothes and a toy car he said was Johnny's favorite plaything and copies of *Wild West* magazine and family photographs in frames and souvenirs he said Johnny had sent him from different places, like a pillow with "A Century of Progress" painted on it. Then, at the end, with the crowd as quiet and respectful as church, he would unfold the suit he said Johnny was wearing the day he was shot. When he held it up, you could hear people catch their breath because of all the bullet holes.

"That old man's a natural," Mr. Jax said. "Pay attention to what he does."

Because when I went out, it was just like air leaking out of a balloon. Pretty soon I'd hear people muttering, "That ain't Billie Frechette." Crowds would get smaller after a few days, and by the end of the run there'd be hecklers. Mr. Dillinger could make people blubber, but it was me they were waiting to hear from . . .

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Not long ago a woman reporter told me something about Johnny as a kid. The summer he turned thirteen, he organized a gang bang for some of his pals. He didn't know any more about sex than they did—it was probably his first time. But he found the girl, gave a demonstration as best he could, then stood lookout while the others took their turn.

She asked if he'd ever mentioned this to me. I said no, but it didn't surprise me. I was wishing I'd known about it when me and Mr. Dillinger had our blowup. Just an average American boy!

Mr. Dillinger was plenty upset as it was. I said, "If you knew as much as you think you do, you'd know he lied to you about being married."

"You're the liar," he says.

"I was already married. And even if I *had* married him, he would definitely have been second or third choice."

"Liar!"

I said, "You call me a liar again and I'm going to forget you're an old man and do something we'll both be sorry for!"

Mr. Jax had to step in between us.

Later he said, "Sometimes the Indian in you really comes out." I'd heard that before, too. It could mean anything.

People didn't want to listen to another set talk after Mr. Dillinger got finished. They had to ask questions or bust. What was his favorite sport? What was his favorite song? Questions were tame back then. Usually they knew the answers better than I did. The first time someone wanted to know his favorite song, I said, "Home on the Range," and half a dozen people called out, "What about 'Happy Days Are Here Again'?" "Well," I said, "can't a fella have more than one favorite?"

I couldn't remember anything special about the way he dressed. I don't think I *ever* knew what he liked to eat. Things like that didn't make no impression on me.

Mr. Dillinger would get mad enough to have a stroke. "My son's eyes was blue—not brownish-green or greenish-grey or any other color except *blue!* He dressed in style, he had a ruby ring and a five-hundred-dollar gold watch! Bread and gravy's what *you* like to eat," he said. "You're the one that likes 'Home on the Range' and baseball games!"

"Is that true?" Mr. Jax said. "Is that what you've been doing?

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Christ, Billie," he says, "it's only been two years. How could you forget? Those were the days!"

Louis visited me right after I was sentenced. Johnny had just made headlines again, shooting his way out of Little Bohemia Lodge. Six people dead or wounded, something like that. President Roosevelt went on radio to tell people not to glorify criminals. Everyone knew who he meant. Louis said J. Edgar Hoover put him up to it because Johnny kept making the FBI look like fools.

But Johnny was depressed, Louis said. "He's had enough, Billie, he wants out. This time he means it. First he has to have plastic surgery. While that's going on, I'll file your appeal. He wants you out in time to go with him to Mexico."

"Don't do it," I said.

He wasn't listening. "Even if we lose, he'll be waiting for you when you do get out. He said to tell you that. He said to tell you he'll do whatever has to be done. You're the only woman he ever loved, Billie."

He looked more like a kewpie doll than ever. I said, "Well, tell him to take care of himself."

"Take care of himself! Is that the only message you have to send?"

"It's a good message for him."

Which it was. Two months later he was lying dead in the alley by the Biograph Theater.

One afternoon someone asked me how I felt about the Woman in Red—"him taking up with her and all that while you was in jail."

People had Anna Sage and Polly Hamilton mixed up then, or rolled into one. I wasn't clear about them myself. He walked out of the Biograph with two women, but one dropped out of sight so fast hardly anyone noticed her. Actually, she was his new girl friend—a call girl Anna had been using for bait. But it was Anna, wearing that red dress and fighting to collect the reward, that stuck in everyone's mind.

I said, "Well, I never expected him not to have another girl just because I was in jail, so I don't have no feelings about her one way or another. I never did have," I said.

Mr. Jax was waiting for me in the tent, shaking his head. We were getting near the Oklahoma line by then, "heading into real Dillinger country," Mr. Jax said. "We've got to get your act in shape."

I said, "Tell me what you want me to say and I'll say it."

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"Next time someone asks about the Woman in Red, don't say you weren't *never* jealous, say in this case you didn't have no *reason* to be. Say you know from reliable sources that the Woman in Red was just a friend, someone that encouraged him to think of her as an older sister he could talk to and trust. She let him hide out in her place, then betrayed him—for money! Say you'd forgive him even if there was more to it than that: 'All of us have faced temptation and fallen. I will not cast the first stone. But I truly believe I have nothing to forgive him for. He was betrayed by a woman, yes! but not by the woman he loved!' "

"Well," I said, deadpan, "if you want me to remember all that you'd better write it down. I'd never think of it by myself."

He lost his temper. "You claim you can't remember the color of his eyes, you claim you never got jealous! What the hell *do* you remember? What kind of feelings *did* you have?"

I don't know why everyone expected me to be jealous. It was always the other way around. We hadn't been together two months before he took it in his head that I was making eyes at Eddie Shouse, a driver they sometimes used. Good-looking fellow, always had a girl on each arm and another one waiting in the car. I liked him but never paid no attention to his flirting. That's just the way he was.

But one day Johnny come storming in and pulled his .38 on me. "Get your hat and coat, you're going for a ride."

This was in Chicago. We were sharing an apartment with Pete and Mary. They heard him yelling at me and come out into the hall in time to see him prodding me along with that .38. Pete says, "Use your common sense, Johnny. Shouse'll make a pass at anything in skirts. That ain't Billie's fault."

"She's leading him on. He wouldn't have the guts."

"What if she is?" Mary says. "She has a right to go for any guy she pleases. If she likes him, who are you to stop her?"

Which might sound like she was on my side, but really she was trying to stir him up more. It wasn't the first time.

He made me drive to a deserted stretch on the lakefront and park. "You got anything to say?"

"No."

"You don't seem to realize you're gonna *die*, sister!"

I didn't answer, just stared out the window on my side and thought about the wind blowing through the house, bare floors, bare walls, like sitting in the cockpit of a plane.

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He said, "Remember what I told you when we met—that if you'd be on the level I'd give everybody the go-by for you?"

I said, "Well, I've been on the level. I can't help it if you don't believe me."

"I told you if you couldn't feel the same towards me as I felt towards you, then not to come when I sent for you—remember?"

"Yes."

"Why'd you come?" I couldn't think of any answer that wouldn't make things worse.

He said, "It's not enough for me if you just respect me, Billie. If you can't love me, I'd be better off not ever seeing you again."

I went on looking out the window. I wasn't going to beg.

"What's Ed Shouse got? What do you dames see in him? What makes you get all wet between the legs just because a guy's good-looking and has a fancy line?"

I turned and stared at him, disgusted.

He started rambling—all the women that'd let him down, his wife divorcing him while he was in the pen, a girl breaking off their engagement because she didn't want to settle down, another one skipping town with a square, he thought I was different—he was planning to take me to meet his dad, etc.

I thought, Maybe he'll get it out of his system—and, sure enough, he trailed off after a while and lowered the gun and just set there. Then he all of a sudden grinned. "One thing I will say, kiddo, you don't lose your head easy."

I said, "Well, you ought to know that from just last week." I meant being with him in the Terraplane when he ditched four police cars—the wildest chase Chicago had ever seen. "I didn't lose my head because I know you're a good driver. You take chances, but I never yet seen you wreck a car."

"Put that in your purse till we get home," he says, handing me the .38.

He parked in front of the building and put his arm around my shoulder as we went up the walk. He rung the bell instead of using his key so Pete would have to look through the peephole. Pete really whooped: "They're back safe!"

"What happened?" Mary said. Johnny put on his best shit-kicking grin. "I couldn't do it."

I went on down the hall and into the bedroom. Mary followed me. I don't know what she had in mind, but before she could open her mouth I pulled the .38 out of my purse and pointed it right in her

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face. "Say one more word against me, bitch—*ever*—and there'll be some dead snatch around here!"

She backed out of the room, white as dough. She knew I wasn't kidding—and knew I wasn't just talking about Eddie Shouse, neither.

She was at it again, though, in Florida. And twenty years later still at it. One July a Chicago newspaper run an "anniversary story" on Johnny's death, and reporters rustled her up for an interview. Not that it was ever hard to do. They asked if she knew what'd become of me. "Oh, no," she said, "she dropped out of sight. Billie was a very unusual person," she said. "She didn't have a single good feature except her eyes. She didn't know how to dress or use makeup or do her hair. The rest of us couldn't understand what Johnny seen in her—except he was always for the underdog."

I asked him to stop teaming up with Pete. When the gang rented more than one hideout, him and Pete always went in together. I said, "I can't get along with her in the same *house*, much less the same *bedroom*."

"What are you talking about?" he said. "You and her don't do nothing."

"Well, neither do you and Pete, so what's the point?"

"The point is, he's my pal—and he likes company."

The questions the reporter asked made me realize how much times had changed. She looked like she hadn't been out of college more than a couple of years. Pretty, too. But right away she wanted the dirt. "Was there any group sex in the gang?" I said I didn't think what we done could be called that—just sometimes we'd be in the same bedroom. "Was that Dillinger's idea?" I said it was the men's. "Did you detect any homosexual overtones?" No. "Did he force you to continue after you objected?" No.

And didn't force me to go to Tucson, neither, when he come after me all the way from Florida. "*That's* what people want to hear," Mr. Jax said. "Not how you wouldn't cook his goddamn breakfast!"

He drove into the yard and honked the horn. I looked out the door. "I'm here to repossess my car," he says.

"Well, it's right there in front of you, and the keys are in it."

"Who's gonna drive this one back to Chicago, that's what I want to know."

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It was the first time he'd ever seen Neopit, and vice versa. My mother didn't have no idea who he was, even after I introduced him, but she said, "I knew somebody was coming. Last night Evelyn took the tarp off the car. I asked her what she was doing. I said it might snow. 'I know,' she said, 'but I feel restless.' "

He looked funny because the tarp hadn't been taken off the car, it was still there—but "restless" was just what he wanted to hear. He followed me into the kitchen. The first thing he saw was that picture of Lindbergh. "Nice-looking fella," he grins. Then started in on me to go with him to Arizona. The others were already on the way there from Florida. "I told 'em I had to go by way of Wisconsin."

"What's in Arizona?"

"A new life, Billie. I've got fifty thousand in cash. I've made my mark. Out there, we'll be just a hop, skip, and jump from the border. After that—well, what do you say?"

It wasn't the money, it wasn't Mexico. I can't explain what flashed through my mind, but clear as daylight I saw that what was going to happen had already happened, and now I had to go through with it or it would always be waiting for me.

He'd dropped Red Hamilton off in Chicago. He went back to pick him up. They were supposed to meet me in three days in Aurora.

Instead, he come by himself. We started driving day and night without stopping. I forget just where we picked up a paper with the headline, *DILLINGER WANTED FOR MURDER*. It turned out him and Red had robbed a bank in East Chicago but had been surprised by the police. In the shooting, Red was hurt. So was a cop. Now the cop had died. So it had finally come around. "That makes three of you," I said.

"Yeah, but they ain't got a case against *me*."

No use reminding him that the only reason they had a case against Pete and Chuck was because they killed a sheriff springing *him* from Lima jail. He was too busy gloating over witnesses that were coming to his defense in East Chicago. "Listen to this: 'A woman who was cashing a check started to hand her money over to Dillinger but he refused it, saying politely that he was robbing a bank, not the people.' "

All the papers played up how he turned back when Red was hit and helped him to the car. ("Hell, yes," he says, "he was carrying the money!") "Four policemen had a clear shot at him during those

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moments when he refused to desert his accomplice, but as usual he was miraculously untouched in the hail of bullets."

Things like that sent him sky-high: "Miraculously untouched! That's me!"

What they couldn't do in Chicago, Indianapolis, or Minneapolis-St. Paul, they done in Tucson. Someone recognized Boobie Clark from a picture in the post office. The cops spent a day trailing us around, picking us off one or two at a time. No big gun battles, just a wipeout of the whole gang except Red Hamilton.

Three states wanted Johnny—Indiana finally got him. They took him to Crown Point because a new wing had just been added to the jail there, guaranteed escape-proof. To make sure, they put extra guards on duty around the clock.

The girls were packed off to Indianapolis—all except me. I suddenly found myself on the street, and Louis was handing me some money and a railroad ticket to St. Paul. "Rent an apartment and keep in touch. Johnny's orders." That's all he'd tell me.

The girls served thirty days. The fellows never made the street again. They were tried in Lima for killing that sheriff. Pete and Chuck got the chair. Boobie got life.

Johnny was charged with murder, too. I went to St. Paul and sent the address. It wasn't over yet. I knew I'd see him again.

A month later he was knocking on the door.

There wasn't nothing miraculous about the escape. He had a real gun.

"Billie, Billie," Mr. Jax says, "how could anyone smuggle a real gun into the jail where *John Dillinger* was being held! It's against common sense."

"Well, how could anyone smuggle enough guns into Pendleton that Pete, Chuck, Boobie, and six others could bust out? But Johnny fixed it—the biggest break the state pen ever had. He fixed that, and Louis fixed this. Money," I said. "*That's* what's common sense."

He took two hostages and drove off in the sheriff's own car. He'd grabbed a machine gun by that time, but when he turned the two men loose at the edge of town, he reached in his pocket and flashed a .45 in front of their eyes. "Want to see what got me downstairs, boys? Wood and shoe polish!"

They made the mistake of telling this to the newspapers. They

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said they thought he was pulling their leg—it looked like a real .45 to them. The tier guard that'd had it poked in his stomach said the same thing. Nobody else got a good look at it. As soon as he got to the ground floor and a machine gun, he put it in his pocket. Pretty soon, though, everybody was talking about that wooden gun. It was *his* story they believed.

In St. Paul, I asked him to show it to me. He said he'd left it with Louis in Chicago—didn't want to lose it—someday it'd be valuable. "I suppose you think it's a lot of hooey," he said.

"Well, seeing's believing."

I was joking and thought he was, too, but all of a sudden he got sore. "You'll see it," he says. "Don't judge everyone by yourself."

At the reunion, Audrey slipped over to me. "I hope you don't mind him giving this to me."

"Oh, no."

She had a funny little smile. "Did you know I'm thirteen years older than Johnny?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, no reason. I'm the only mother he ever had," she said.

I told Mr. Jax I couldn't prove it, but in my opinion that wooden gun was a cover story for Louis. Louis knew people thought Johnny could do anything. If he said he rounded up eight deputies with a wooden gun, you could forget about anyone suspecting a fix.

Mr. Jax got as sore as Johnny. "That gun's part of American history! But if it *was* a cover story—which I don't believe—then it's to his credit that he didn't tell you."

No use saying that wasn't the reason.

I said, "Know who else he didn't tell? Pete and Chuck. They tried the same thing on Death Row, using soap instead of wood. Chuck was shot to pieces, and Pete burned right on schedule."

He said, "Billie, if you want people to like and respect you, you better get over trying to debunk John Dillinger. That's not what you're getting paid for."

Funny, but the night before that reporter was due, I was sitting at the kitchen table and all at once I could remember letter-perfect everything Mr. Jax and Mr. Dillinger ever wanted me to say. I thought, Well, better late than never. I needed an operation for a little growth on my neck—I was hoping she'd help me out, me giving her an exclusive interview and all. I was ready to start with how

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it was love at first sight when Johnny walked in the nightclub and go on from there.

She was polite but she set me straight in the first ten minutes. "Billie," she said, "I'm not here to get the same old Robin Hood line. The angle I'm working on is the truth behind the macho legend."

He had a gun in St. Paul I hadn't seen before. It wasn't wood, though—it was a pistol-sized machine gun that he could hide under his coat. He'd had it made special. He tried it out on jobs in Iowa and South Dakota while they were still looking for him in Chicago, and he used it when they finally caught up with us early one morning in St. Paul. He fired through the door, driving them back, then tore the hall to pieces while I flew down the back stairs, wearing nothing but my slip and Persian lamb. I backed the car out of the garage, but he wouldn't get in—he kept shooting up the rear end of the building. "For God's sake, get in!" I screamed. He didn't care who he killed.

He was bleeding in one leg, so I had to drive. How we got to Minneapolis I'll never know. All I can remember is what a relief it was to see daylight again. In St. Paul we had to keep the shades drawn, couldn't go out till after dark, had to sneak down the back stairs. I never did get used to hiding out.

He was stretched out on the back seat. I heard him mumble, "You're okay, kid."

"Thanks."

"Yeah—you too," he says after a second.

I looked around. He'd been talking to that gun.

This reporter had her own ideas about guns. She brought up Clyde Barrow, George Kelly, Baby Face Nelson. The only one I knew was Baby Face. Kelly's wife, though, was on my tier in Milan. She had it in for me until she saw I wouldn't pull rank on her. I never talked about Johnny at all; she talked about George all the time—mostly trying to convince us that she'd been the real brains of the Kelly gang, and if he'd listened to her they'd be out "drinking good beer," as she used to say, instead of doing life. She liked to read his letters from Alcatraz out loud and make fun of the mushy parts. She said she didn't know how he ever got the name "Machine Gun" Kelly—people might *think* he could write his name on the wall with bullets, but he couldn't even *hit* a wall. Her name was Kathryn.

I was picked up not long after Nelson joined the new gang, so I

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didn't know him very well—though as well as I wanted to. A mean killer. It was worth your life to call him Baby Face. As far as I could tell, his wife was crazy about him.

Johnny took him in after Crown Point, along with some others of the same kind. The only one left from the old gang was Red. On the Iowa and South Dakota jobs, he shot out windows, kicked hostages, cursed at women, and went out of his way to kill. "I don't like it no better than you do," Johnny says to Red, "but that's the way they want it." By "they" he meant the cops, the FBI, the banks. The same line he peddled at the reunion.

Red wasn't fooled. "Johnny won't have to worry about his rep," he said to me on the sly, "as long as he's got Baby Face."

It was Baby Face the public got down on. Once when they were using two cars, someone threw tacks under his tires but not Johnny's. He died in a ditch. The body wasn't even claimed.

Johnny was laid out in state in the morgue. Lines a quarter of a mile long. Someone selling pieces of cloth they said had been dipped in the blood in the alley. Mr. Dillinger went to get the body. Lines outside the funeral parlor in Mooresville. Big mob at the cemetery. Couldn't hardly get the coffin out of the hearse. Tombstone chipped to bits as quick as it was put up. Mr. Dillinger said he had to have the casket dug up and set in concrete, then concrete slabs poured in the dirt over it. "People wouldn't believe he was dead, they wanted to see with their own eyes."

You couldn't feel sorry for him—he was too pleased and proud. "Audrey chased two fellers back to their car one day and seen California license plates!"

From Minneapolis we went to Chicago, then to the reunion, then to Indianapolis, then back to Chicago. I could almost feel the wind at my back. We shouldn't have gone near Chicago—the heat was on worse than anyplace. But he was in an ugly mood, he wanted to see Louis in person. "I'll give him one more chance. And then—" He cocked his finger at his temple. He was hell-bent on making good that lie about us being married.

Louis tried to get out of meeting him; he was sure he'd be followed. But Johnny wouldn't take no for an answer and wouldn't explain what he wanted on the phone. Finally Louis agreed to meet him in a bar on North State Street about ten P.M.

I knew he'd spill the beans if I didn't get to him first, so when

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Johnny was parking the car I said, "Let me go in ahead of you to see if the coast is clear."

He looked at me kind of funny—I didn't usually volunteer—and besides that, the Feds now wanted me for harboring. Then he said, "Okay, but if he ain't there, *scram!* Don't hang around."

The place was crowded—I couldn't see him—but I hung around for a few minutes in case he was in the men's or something. I heard a car horn blasting away—I don't know why it didn't register sooner. I beat it for the door—I could hear a motor being gunned, tires squealing. I run right into the big paws of the FBI.

"What's the matter?" I said to Mr. Jax. "Does it sound like I'm blaming him for making his getaway? Tell me what you want me to say. It wasn't his fault—I done it to myself."

He wouldn't answer, just looked at me.

"Well, not on *purpose*," I said, "if that's what you're thinking."

We hit a spell of cyclone weather down near the corner of Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Twisters like rattlesnakes all through that section. We'd be coming to a town and see a rooftop hanging in a tree, or a telephone pole sticking through the side of a barn like a toothpick. Everybody's nerves were on edge.

One afternoon—I remember how sultry and still it was—a woman asked me how many scars Johnny had on his body. I'd never been asked that before. Maybe it seemed too personal—but whether it was that or the weather or what, I went blank. I said, "Well, he had a scar from climbing a barbed-wire fence as a boy."

There was some shuffling around, people cutting their eyes at each other. "She means from the times he was shot," a man said.

"Well, he was pretty lucky, you know. He got creased a lot of times but he didn't really have what you'd call scars—no, not that I remember."

"She ain't Billie Frechette."

Mr. Dillinger had been laying off me for a while—now he landed with both feet. "My son was hunted and hounded and cut down in cold blood, and you tell people he didn't have no scars! I was the one identified the body, I *seen*—" He broke clear down.

"Well, I didn't say *no* scars, just none I could remember."

"If you can't remember, who can?" Mr. Jax said.

All of a sudden I screamed, "Anybody'd think I spent my whole life with John Dillinger instead of one piss-ant year!"

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Mr. Dillinger turned and walked out. "I won't be on the same platform with her no more."

Mr. Jax didn't run after him. He knew who was leaving and who was staying. "Billie, Billie, Billie—you're just not making 'em believe that you were the love of his life."

"Or vice versa."

He wasn't interested in that, never had been. "I'm gonna have to let you go, Billie."

He was right about one thing—the Woman in Red took my place. When I left the carnival, I pledged not to talk about John Dillinger again. Every now and then someone would track me down, but I stuck to my rule for thirty years.

I didn't mention money until this reporter was in the house. "I've had to scramble these past few years. Take a look around," I said, wishing I hadn't had my hair touched up—her eyes went right to it.

She was interested in what I told her about Kathryn Kelly. "Mightn't she have been saying he wasn't so hot in bed—'couldn't hit a wall' with his gun?"

"She was disappointed in him, but *brains* was what he didn't have."

She asked if Johnny had anything to "compensate for." "Was he underendowed, for instance?"

"That'd have to be in his opinion, wouldn't it?"

"Not necessarily. *Was* it his opinion?"

I said I didn't know.

"What about Harry Pierpont?"

"Pete? How would I know? Ask Mary Kinder."

"She's been saying for a number of years that they weren't lovers, more like brother and sister."

"Well, that's news to me."

"Did you ever sense that Johnny was showing off for Pete—to help him along?" I thought: If any of this is true, no wonder Mary Kinder hated me!

I wasn't surprised when she begun to lose patience with me. I could read her mind a mile off—I was one of those women that men make doormats out of. Half Indian besides—probably didn't care much about sex, just laid there. My opinion of her was she had a one-track mind.

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"Listen," I said, "I'd like to help you, I could use some money, but as far as I'm concerned you're barking up the wrong tree."

She asked what I thought her angle should be. I couldn't explain. I kept wanting to say, "Well, he was deceitful in the way the old people say evil spirits are. He didn't really have a shape of his own, he could only *take* shapes." I thought, The older I get, the more I go blanket, just like Maw.

When I was in the hospital with my neck, I found a book by Lindbergh's wife on the bookcart—diaries and letters telling how they met and such. I felt sad seeing pictures of him looking the way he looked on my wall. He had a smile that lifted right off the page, the clearest eyes. I remember when I first tacked his picture up. I was seventeen. My mother said, "Who's that?" Without even thinking I said, "Someone that's got Power."

"What do you know about Power?"

She never had told me about it, of course, but I must have picked it up somewhere.

"I don't know if it's the same," I said, "but if a white man can have it, he's got it. I can tell by the eyes."

His wife saw it, too. Oh, she fell hard when she met him. She told herself she wasn't going to be taken in, but something burned like a bright fire in his eyes. He made her feel like he could do anything. The minute he proposed she said yes. She didn't expect it, didn't want the kind of life he was offering, but what could she do? There he was, she said—she had to go.

My mother studied that picture several days before she said anything. Then all of a sudden she started talking about the old ways. "When I was a girl, I went out in the woods and fasted so that I would see the future. Back then, young girls who seen the sun or wind believed they'd find happiness, they'd get a good husband. But in my dream the wind was pressing like a hand against my back, pushing me faster and faster along a road until I was almost skimming. I turned my head and seen a tall dark shape, but I couldn't make out any feature except his eyes—cold and blue as ice, but at the same time they burned. I told my mother and she said I'd seen the Wandering Man, a spirit who never rests but goes round and round the earth with a burden on his back. He takes many different shapes, but when you see him, it means misfortune unless you perform special ceremonies."

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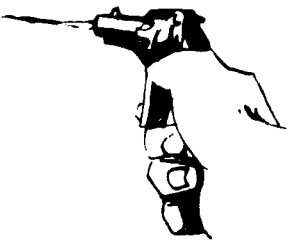
"Did you perform them?"

"I started to, but I quit because I was in school—I was afraid to ask the Sisters for time off."

"About payment—" this woman said.

"Forget it," I said, to save her the trouble. "I never could make anything out of John Dillinger."



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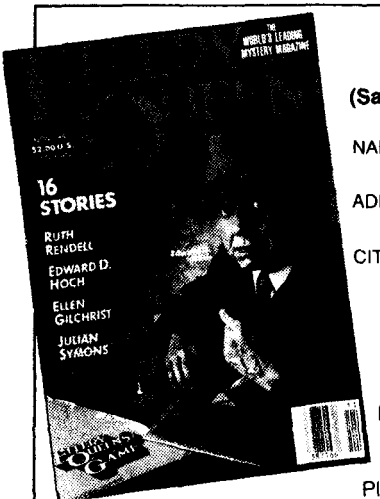

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Many authors have explored a particular historical setting with good effect in a series of mystery tales. Some that come to mind include Peter Lovesey and England of the 1880s in stories about Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackeray, Lillian de la Torre's Dr. Sam: Johnson short stories set in 1770s England, Richard Falkirk's accounts of Edmund Blackstone and the Bow Street Runners of the early 1880s, John Sanders' Seventeenth Century settings with Nicholas Pym, William F. Buckley's version of Cold War history in his Blackford Oakes series, John Dickson Carr's remarkable tales of Nineteenth Century England, and Robert Van Gulik's narratives about Judge Dee in the China of the 600s.

Among the longest and most telling of these are Ellis Peters' novels about Brother Cadfael in Twelfth Century rural England. This series reaches thirteen with *The Rose Rent* (Morrow, $15.95). A wealthy young widow, Judith Perle, has given a nice property to the abbey in Shrewsbury on payment of an annual rent: a single rose, from a large plant on the property. A whimsical act, this, but not, one would think, a dangerous act. Yet someone tries to kill the rose, and does kill Brother Eluric who interrupts the destruction. Then Judith disappears, and the dying is not yet done. Cadfael listens, observes, decides what best to do. Very effective storytelling, with hues sharp and deep and my feelings fully and irresistibly engaged.

The Isle of Fire Murder by Barbara Yager Witten (Walker, $15.95) is a polished first novel, well capturing its Fire Island locale and told in a nice easy style. Lily Lambert, just widowed, heads for the summer to her home in Sharon's Landing, a tiny community of New Yorkers on the island. She's mourning her husband and loneliness, and prone to overcompensate by leaping into bed. Nothing like a little murder to stir interest, a murder with suspicion capable of generous spreading around the community. The investigator is a policeman Lily knows, so she's drawn into the affair by that connection as well—to prove that a little insight and knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

Joe L. Hensley, on the evidence of *Robak's Firm* (Doubleday, $12.95), is as adept at the short story as the novel. This Indiana judge here applies his years of legal experience and insight to a rich variety of situations, some involving his series character, Indiana lawyer Donald Robak. Also present, in three stories, is Cannert, a dying man touring Florida looking for traces of his missing wife, and preying on the predators as he goes. The same sort of theme, from a Jack the Ripper viewpoint, turns

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up in another tale. In "The Home" (*EQMM*, 11/85), a tough but aging defense attorney retires to Eden, where the old and infirm get very attentive care—and nobody, it develops, leaves. Fifteen stories here, of very high standard.

Michael Gilbert, recently acclaimed Grand Master of the craft by the Mystery Writers of America, offers his 27th book: *Trouble* (Harper & Row, $15.95). Gilbert, now retired from his London law practice, rarely repeats himself and so this is different from previous work—an exploration of racial tensions and terrorists and what their interplay might beget. The IRA has explosive plans for London for the upcoming bombing season. But officials are making it quite difficult to get the necessary material into the country. At the same time, an area on the Thames waterfront, heretofore a fairly harmonious if clearly divided community of Pakistani and English heritage, erupts into violence, escalating into death. Gilbert's is an absorbing narrative, but one that even so would have benefited from a more clearly defined principal-character role.

Stuart Woods' novels, *Chiefs* and *Deep Lie*, dazzled readers and critics, and *Chiefs* became a TV miniseries. I missed both books, alas, but now we have *Under the Lake* (Simon and Schuster, $17.95), which returns to the Georgia setting of *Chiefs*. John Howell is a booze-soaked investigative reporter whose marriage is crashing and who is reduced to ghost-writing the autobiography of a wealthy boob with political aspirations. He goes to the town of Sutherland in the northern mountains to play ghost. Sutherland is on the shore of a man-made lake; the man, Eric Sutherland, continues to dominate the town, and both seem uneasy about the past, the present, and what's under the lake. This is part supernatural gothic, part crime story, partly about love and commitment, partly about living and dying, and wholly an unforgettable experience.

Robert Gainsborough's second novel about Nero Wolfe, following Rex Stout, is *Death on Deadline* (Bantam, $14.95). Those looking for minute deviations from the Stout oeuvre will doubtless find a few nits to pick here again, but for me this return to the brownstone on West Thirty-fifth Street in New York has the feel and enjoyment of solid canonical material. And an Introduction by Stout's biographer, John J. McAleer (who through oversight is unidentified in the book) is candid, literate, and informed. Wolfe's favorite newspaper is the takeover target of Ian MacLaren, whose other papers specialize in raunch and sleaze. Nero volunteers his assistance to fend off the pirate, does so at great expense and without a client. Then comes a corpse. Suicide, say the police and all interested parties in harmonious unison. Murder, says Wolfe, and sets out to prove it. The usual characters—Goodwin and the others of Wolfe's household, Saul Panzer, and Inspector Cramer—are here, too, and much will be your pleasure in the reading.

Manhattan attorney Thomas Hauser writes mostly about his

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city, and in *Dear Hannah* (Tor, $14.95) he brings back Richard Marritt, NYPD detective. A personable man is meeting young women, winning their confidences and invitations to their apartments, and cutting their throats. Murderous psychopaths on the streets of New York are hardly uncommon, at least fictionally, but still the citizenry is not charmed as the killings go on and Marritt and colleagues haven't a clue. Hannah Wade—single, beautiful, a dance instructor—is receiving anonymous gifts—dead roses. And the far from anonymous attentions of a lovesick high-school classmate, reappearing suddenly after all these years and pledging his unlikely and unwanted troth. Somewhere in all this is the psychopath, who as yet has made no mistakes. Suspense and interest well sustained, though I don't know that I care for the ambiguity of the ending.

Haughton Murphy's second case for retired Wall Street lawyer Reuben Frost is *Murder Takes a Partner* (Simon & Schuster, $15.95). Frost is board chairman of the National Ballet. NatBallet's immensely creative artistic director is Clifton Holt. Holt is also immensely immoral and, shortly, immensely dead. The killer seems to be a young mugger and drug-runner. A random street killing would be bad enough, but then it appears the killer was well paid for his duties. Frost seeks to hold the ballet company together while he and homicide cop Lius Batista try to figure out which of a richness of suspects paid the killer's bill. Septuagenarian Frost is an agreeable addition to the gallery of series sleuths.

Murder at Vassar by Elizabeth Atwood Taylor (St. Martin's, $15.95) is a reprise for Maggie Elliott. Having dealt with death in San Francisco, and formed a detective agency as a result, she's here at Vassar in New York for her fifteen-year reunion. Other classes are having gatherings, too, and someone has staged a murder for the entertainment of all. Pudgy Warren Brown celebrates her twenty-fifth in jail, suspected by the police, despite all her millions, of having pulled the trigger. This, of course, will not do, and Elliott is retained to get her out and off. But Maggie is new at this and now a long way from her experienced partner. Still, a job is a job, and the police are too content with their suspect, as Maggie in due course—and naturally to her own peril—quite convincingly demonstrates. Well told and entertaining, even if Elliott isn't the most appealing heroine to be found.

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"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

The vicar said to Geoffrey, "You're not brooding on this man, are you? The driver?"

"No," said Geoffrey truthfully. "There doesn't seem to be much point. I'd like to see him caught and banned from driving for life, but beyond that— We don't even know it was a Honda that drove into her car. That was just the witness's impression—a silver-blue Honda."

A compelling tale of murder, complete with expert, fair-playing twists, from an internationally recognized master of the genre . . .

THE WOMAN IN THE WARDROBE

by ROBERT BARNARD

It was after the funeral when the relatives and friends had gone and the house felt cold and empty that Geoffrey Harcourt felt his loss most keenly. The beginning of my aloneness, he thought. It was Monday, too, the start of the school's half-term holiday. Of course, he could go along to the office—there was always work for a headmaster to do—but that would only be exchanging one emptiness for another. There were friends he could visit, but he knew that their avoidance of him was partly from the kindliest of motives, partly to spare themselves awkwardness. Geoffrey was a reticent man, not one to hawk around his sense of loss.

The vicar had told him how it would be and he had been right. In fact, the vicar phoned him that evening, knowing how low he would feel after the funeral. Geoffrey had been listening to Mahler. He had always said that Mahler was getting to be that bit overrated,

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but in his current state the *Ninth* said things to him that it had never said before. The things it said were not comfortable things, though. He got more comfort from his chat with the vicar.

"Try to keep busy," the vicar said in his normal voice, which was a comfort after all the hushed tones. "There must be lots of books around the house that were Helen's rather than yours. The library would probably be grateful for them. Good second-hand clothes are always in demand, particularly in hard times like the present. We at the church could get rid of them for you. I don't mean that you should wipe the house clean of all reminders of her—heaven forbid—but you'll be glad in a month or two's time that you don't have those things still to do. —You're not brooding on this man, are you? The driver?"

"No," said Geoffrey truthfully. "There doesn't seem much point. I'd like to see him caught and banned from driving for life, but beyond that— We don't even know it was a man, by the way. We don't even know it was a Honda that drove into her car. That was just the witness's impression—a silver-blue Honda. No, I'm truly not brooding over him. It's just the emptiness."

"I know, old chap. As I say, just try to keep busy. I'll come round in a few days and see if you've got anything for us."

So for the rest of the evening Geoffrey combed through the various bookcases that dotted the house. He found twenty or thirty books—novels, travel books, books connected with the sociology course Helen had been doing at the City Polytechnic. He made them up into a rough parcel and told himself he would ring the library next day. Certainly the activity had kept his mind occupied.

In the morning, after breakfast—the time of day when he and Helen had been most entirely together—he decided to tackle the clothes. He could not really see that he need keep anything at all. He would shrink from asking any of his or Helen's relatives if they would like anything and he was certain they would in any case have refused. Helen's interest in clothes was strictly utilitarian—she bought what would wear well, what was suitable for a headmaster's wife, there was no sentimental feeling involved. His mind was crowded with memories of Helen, but what she had worn on those occasions he would have been quite at a loss to say.

He put two old suitcases on the bed and opened the half of the wardrobe that contained the drawers. He piled underclothes and nightgowns, tights and hats into one case—and though he did it

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quickly and expertly, he was surprised to find when he had finished that he was nearly crying. Should he make himself a cup of coffee? No. He would finish first. Ten minutes would do it easily.

He threw open the other door. His first emotion was merely a dim kind of puzzlement: something was not quite right. It was only after a few seconds that the full impact hit him. Here were all the clothes that he, absent-mindedly, knew so well—dresses and suits she had worn to the school meetings, the three-quarter-length gown she wore to their very occasional dinner-dance. But here, too— He went forward and fingered them wonderingly.

In the darkest, innermost part of the wardrobe were clothes he had never seen. Clothes he could never imagine Helen wearing. They were bright, sensuous clothes, in rich materials—silks, cashmeres. He kept feeling them, as if that would make them real. He could not take his bewildered eyes off them. These were the clothes of a woman of the world: smart, fashionable clothes. He had seen women dressed like this in Bond Street. He could imagine the woman who owned them in the stalls at Covent Garden, dancing at the Dorchester. That evening dress—it shimmered; it was positively glamorous.

He shut the wardrobe door sharply and leaned his head against it for a moment. Then he went downstairs to make that cup of coffee. He sat down at the kitchen table to drink it and tried to collect his thoughts.

He rejected almost as soon as it entered his head the idea that she was storing the clothes for a friend. What friend had she that would wear clothes like *that?* Why would she be asked to store only the expensive, fashionable clothes? No, they were Helen's. She had known that, short of her being very ill, he would never think of looking in her wardrobe.

What did she want them for? Did she wear them during the day while he was at school? Did she float around the house in a dream of aristocratic elegance, imagining herself at cocktails in Mayfair, dancing the night away at some aristocratic sprig's twenty-first? It seemed so unlike Helen. His wife had been a competent, down-to-earth, no-nonsense woman. So he had always believed.

He steeled himself to go back to the bedroom. He took the clothes from the wardrobe, ran his hand over their softness, felt their textures, admired their cut. He was no expert, had always had to remind himself to comment on his wife's appearance if they were going out, but these clothes seemed to him immensely stylish: they were the

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sort of clothes worn by women who were rich, confident, and attractive. Helen had inherited a house in suburban London when her mother died and had sold it at the current inflated prices.

But the problem was not where she had got the money from. It was why she had felt the desire.

That afternoon, he rang the City Polytechnic. He got on to the Admissions Secretary at once.

"Hello. My name is Geoffrey Harcourt. I'm ringing about my wife, Helen Harcourt."

"Oh, yes, I remember her well," said a friendly female voice. "We had many good chats when she was deciding on her course."

"I think she told me about them. I'm afraid she's dead."

"Oh, dear! I *am* sorry! Had she been ill for some time?"

"It was a road accident. A hit-and-run driver."

"How *awful*. It must have been a terrible shock for you."

"It was. I just thought I'd ring to inform you, so you can take her off your books."

There was a pause of fully three seconds before the woman said: "Yes, of course. We'll do that. And once again, I *am* sorry."

Geoffrey knew what that pause meant, knew what the woman had been about to say and had stopped herself from saying: Helen had not been on their books for some time.

His night was awful. He lay on the double bed they had shared, feet away from the wardrobe. Nightmarishly, it seemed to him that in the wardrobe he had discovered another woman, a woman who was his wife and not his wife. Helen had had another life unknown to him, in which she was glamorous, fashionable, even seductive. It was as if some sudden crisis or involuntary action had revealed to him a side to his own nature of which he had always been unconscious. Helen was not *like* that, he kept saying to himself, had no desire for that kind of life. But she *was*, she *had*, said the wardrobe.

By next morning he knew he could not leave things there. He had to *know*. He had a grey, old-fashioned Puritan conscience. What his discovery was whispering to him was that somehow he had failed Helen. Still more, that meant he had to *know*.

Over breakfast, feeling furtive and grubby, he went through Helen's checkbook and the monthly statements of her credit-card company. So far as he could see, there were no hotel bills. When Helen

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had started staying overnight on Thursdays ("There are so many evening activities that I'm missing out on and British Rail has practically cut out all the trains after nine"), she told him she had found a little bed-and-breakfast place in Bloomsbury that was clean and cheap. There were no check stubs to bear this out. Nor were there checks made out to more glamorous hotels. There were, though, largish sums on the statement paid to Harrods, Selfridges, and a shop called Amanda's, which was in Knightsbridge. The clothes, obviously.

His mind honed in on the sociology course. They had discussed it quite a bit at first, hardly at all recently. The subjects had become too esoteric and, besides, Geoffrey had the natural contempt of the academic mind for such a subject. It had been a one-day-a-week course, aimed at part-time students and people with special needs. When she had started, she had gone on Wednesdays. Some way into first year, she had said that the day had been changed to Thursdays. But wouldn't that have been immensely disruptive of the students' arrangements, and wouldn't the timetable readjustments have been difficult or impossible? She had changed to Thursdays because—

But, no. Best to put any such thoughts aside. Stick to facts. Keep a firm grip on reality. He had to look at the newspaper to establish that the day was, in fact, Wednesday.

He took the car up to London. He couldn't face the sympathy and inquiries of the people at the station. At Carbury, the small Essex town where he lived, everyone knew everyone.

He drove to the City Polytechnic, then round and round it for twenty minutes until he saw a car pulling out. He nosed into the parking space and walked into the Poly. In the foyer, he prowled around until he found the notice-board with the timetables. With his practiced headmaster's eye he skimmed over the mass of detailed information (so many courses, so little knowledge) till he came to Sociology (Special Needs). If Helen had continued, she would now be taking—had said she *was* taking—the third-year course.

He was right. The course was on Wednesdays. The group was currently engaged in a seminar on The Battered Child Syndrome in Room 347B. They would be out at twelve o'clock. He took the lift up to the third floor and walked through the tedious, anonymous corridors. More like a business firm or a rather run-down hotel than a place of education, he thought. How had Helen fitted in here? Had

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she ever felt at home? He stationed himself near 347B, feeling like a novice plainclothes policeman.

When the seminar broke up, the students trailed out, looking bored. It was difficult to imagine how a terrible, touching subject like battered children could be made boring, but the lecturer seemed to have managed it somehow. About a third of the students were the normal college-age young, others were in their twenties or thirties, the rest Helen's age or older. He picked out a sympathetic woman of about forty and went hesitantly up to her.

"Excuse me, I wonder if you can help me. I'm looking for someone who knew Helen Harcourt when she was a student here."

The woman turned and smiled. "Oh, yes—I knew Helen."

"Well?"

"As well as anyone here, I suppose. Those of us who'd reached the forties mark tended to get together between classes. Why?"

"I'm her husband. Helen died in a road accident last week."

"Oh, *dear*. How tragic. She was so gay and vital."

"Look, would you let me buy you lunch? Is there anywhere around here?"

"I'll let you buy me lunch, but in the canteen," she said. "It's not too bad. I don't know what you want of me, but it can't be worth the price of a restaurant meal."

Over two plates of shepherd's pie and peas, Geoffrey put his cards on the table.

"Since my wife died, I've discovered things about her I never knew before. I didn't know she'd given up her course here, for example, and there are—other things. She had a life for one day a week of which I knew nothing. Please believe it's not anger or pique that makes me feel I have to know. You won't be betraying Helen in anything you tell me. I just want to find out how I failed her."

The woman nodded. "I can understand that. But truly I know nothing that could 'betray' her in any way. We weren't that kind of friends, and she was only here for a term and a half, you know."

"That's what I guessed. Why did she give it up? She seemed so enthusiastic at first."

"Oh, she was. We all were. But the teaching is not too good, and some of the subject areas seem just plain potty. I remember Helen once said to me that she wondered whether what we were studying *was* a subject at all. In fact, quite a lot of us wonder why we go on. Just to get a bit of paper at the end, I suppose."

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"And that was the reason she stopped?"

"I don't know the reason she stopped. But she was expressing boredom, and then one week she wasn't there. She never came again."

"I see. Tell me, did she have any special friends?"

"Well, we're all quite good friends. The young ones tend to keep to themselves, but they're really quite *kind* to us. —I see what you're getting at, of course." She thought. "There was a man—oh, dear, what was his name? There was a Polytechnic party and dance, early in second term that year—"

"Yes, I seem to remember. Helen took the car and drove back very late. I was asleep when she got back in."

"I'm sure it meant nothing special, but she danced a lot with this man. He gave up the course about the time she did, I think, which is why I can't remember his name. He was five or six years younger than Helen, but they seemed to find each other a lot of fun. His business had collapsed, but he was hoping for a job on ICI, on the personnel side. This course was a sort of stopgap. As far as I remember, he got the job and stopped coming."

"There's nothing else you can remember about him—about them—that might suggest—"

"That they were having an affair? That is what we're talking about, isn't it? Oh, dear, I *do* feel this is a betrayal.

"It was so much more, at that stage, a matter of a shared sense of humor. I remember once, when we were all sitting talking in here, this man gave us a marvelous account, with miming and accents and all, of this hotel in Bloomsbury—the Durward, that was it—where they still do real old-fashioned teas, with dainty sandwiches and tea-cake and muffins. And they have dancing after dinner with a palm-court orchestra and lots of faded elegance. I remember your wife laughing till she ached and saying, 'Just like Bertram's Hotel. I'd love to see it.' And this man promised to take her one day. What *was* his name?"

"Would anybody else remember?"

"They might do." She looked around and darted to a table with three or four older students. "His name was Roger Michaels," she said when she returned. "He'd owned a small toy factory but the recession had closed it. And it was ICI he went to." She leaned forward very earnestly. "You do realize I've no *evidence*."

"Oh, of course. It could be someone else entirely. Someone she met

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on the train, for instance. It could be no one. By the way, what did he look like?"

"Dapper. Well set up, but not tall. Lively, always darting here and there. Lots and lots of jokes."

I've never been good on jokes, thought Geoffrey sadly. It seemed as though some great weight was pressing on his back, squeezing the breath out of him. How I failed her, he thought. He had known his wife had been kind, generous, considerate. Now he also knew she had craved color, gaiety, and laughter. How totally he had failed her.

It was still early afternoon when he got back to his car. He thought he had enough information to track this Roger Michaels, but first there was something else he could try to see if he was on the right track. He had lied when he said to Helen's friend that there could be no one, no affair. The clothes were the clothes of a woman in love. But was Michaels the man?

He drove to Bloomsbury, and once again drove round and round before he found a parking space. Then he marked time in Dillons and Foyles until it was four o'clock and tea would be served at the Durward.

It was overpoweringly genteel, like Harrogate in the 'thirties. A pianist played Gershwin and Ivor Novello quite softly, and the sandwiches and cakes nestled on lacy doilies in silver baskets. Only the staff was wrong: a heterogeneous collection of nationalities. But Geoffrey was lucky—he had a genial, potbellied Cypriot with an East London accent. When he was halfway through his tea, he fished from his wallet the photograph of Helen, taken on holiday the year before in Verona, and he beckoned the waiter over.

The waiter's first reaction was to shake his head. "No. No, I can't say I have. Wait—wait a minute, though. I think that must be Mrs. Rogers, so called. Yes—I'd bet my— Mind you, she looks very different there. Quite dowdy, really, as if she'd tried to deglamorize herself. Our Mrs. Rogers— What's this all about, mate? Private detective, are you? I suppose it'll be the real Mrs. Rogers, or whatever her name is."

"When are you off?"

"I finish at six, thank Gawd."

"Care for a drink?"

"I wouldn't say no."

"Meet you outside at six . . ."

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Settled into the Jug and Bottle, just off the Tottenham Court Road, and after a tenner had passed between them, the waiter told Geoffrey all he knew.

"Somehow I always had the suspicion they weren't married. I saw him sign the register when they first stayed the night and he didn't do it confidentlike. What ho! I thought, your name isn't Michael Rogers. Since then, I've noticed he always pays cash, never check or credit card."

"But they register as husband and wife?"

" 'Course they do. What do you think? Mind you, it is a bit out of the usual run of liaisons. Because when you look close, you realize she's older than him. Glamorous, very smart, altogether the superior article, but older. I put her down as a lady from the provinces—and I do *mean* a lady, and a well heeled one—having a fling in London. Though it's more than that, too. You can see she's in love."

The waiter, drinking deep, did not see Geoffrey flinch.

"Do they come to the Durward every week?"

"Oh, yes, they have been doing. 'Cept in the holidays. I put it down to one or the other of them having kiddies home from boarding school."

"So they come every Thursday?"

"That's right. Not last week, but it's probably half term or something. Yes, they come down and have tea in the Garden Room, same as you just done."

"What do they do in the evenings?"

"Sometimes they have dinner at the Durward, and a dance afterwards. But Thursday nights is not very lively. Mostly they go out. Taxi called from the desk, then off to the Savoy or wherever. She in long dress, hair done, beautifully made-up. My God, she can look a stunner! I don't wonder he was taken."

"You said that she's in love. Is he?"

"Oh, I think so. Not a doubt of it. At least until recently—"

"There has been a change?"

"Well, there has and there hasn't. On the surface, everything's been the same. But they've got more serious—had long conversations in low voices over the tea-table. Once I could see she was distressed, though being a lady she was always the same to me if I came up to see if there was anything they wanted. He wasn't upset in quite that way, and I put the change down to him trying to wind up the affair—in the nicest possible way. Say what you like, that's what usually happens when the woman's the older one. Mind you, think-

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ing back on it, he could have been telling her that his wife was suspicious and they'd have to go careful for a bit."

No, Geoffrey thought—he'd used her and was giving her the brush-off. He was conceiving an intense dislike for this Roger Michaels, who worked for ICI and had this great store of jokes. What he felt—he told himself with the bleak honesty of someone whose emotional voltage was low—was not jealousy. Or not primarily jealousy. It was indignation on Helen's behalf. He saw her now as someone who had for years modified her personality to suit the grey, even life which her marriage had offered her, but who had had that other, more daring self waiting to spring out. And when it had done, she had been used by a thoughtless or heartless man and then thrown aside.

"I feel guilty about this," said the waiter, standing up and patting his back pocket, "but a tenner's a tenner. I don't know what the lady who's paying you is like, but *my* pair are nice people. And *she* is a beautiful woman."

I never knew I was married to a beautiful woman, thought Geoffrey sadly.

Next morning, the great weight of failure, of lack of understanding, seemed as crushing as ever. Before breakfast, he drove to his school.

It was like a ghost school—though later, he knew, one of the secretaries would be coming in. He took the L-to-R volume of the London Telephone Directory from the office and drove home. He spoke to nobody. Still less, now, did he wish to have a heart-to-heart with anyone about his loss.

Michaels, fortunately, was not a common name. With the data he had on him, Geoffrey could make a guess at the sort of area he might live in, and from the handful who had the initial R he struck gold with his second call. It was to the R. Michaels who lived in Grafton Avenue, Surbiton.

"Could I speak to Mr. Michaels, please?"

"I'm afraid my husband is away at his job from Mondays to Fridays. Can I help?"

It was a hard, tight little voice, quite neutral in accent.

"Perhaps you can. I'm with *The Economist*, and we're doing a survey of British toy manufacturers—"

"Oh, my husband got out of that long ago. Nearly two years. He saw the way the wind was blowing. He's got a very good job with ICI now."

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"Thank you. That tells me what I wanted to know. I shan't need to trouble you again."

On an impulse, when he had put the phone down, he looked up the number for ICI and got on to the personnel department.

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Michaels isn't here at the moment," a cool competent voice told him. "His main work is with our businesses in the north. He drives up there on Monday mornings and he only comes in here on Fridays, though I believe he drives down on Thursday afternoon."

When he had put the phone down, Geoffrey began wondering about Roger Michaels' arrangements with Helen. Did they meet somewhere, then go on to the Durward together? That seemed likely. Had he been expecting to meet her last Thursday, and would he be waiting again today? Or had he, as the waiter conjectured, broken it off—disguising it, perhaps, as a temporary break while his wife was suspicious, but in brutal reality ditching her?

By now he had made up his mind. At some time in the future, he was going to have to have a talk with Roger Michaels.

But first he wanted to suss out the lie of the land, sniff out the character of his everyday life. He found Grafton Avenue easily in his *London A–Z*. There was nothing to prevent him driving there at once. Half term had still some days to run and doubtless any problems that came up were referred to the Deputy Head.

When he got to Surbiton, he found that at least here parking was no problem. There didn't seem to be much else to be said for the place. He put the car in the next street and walked casually along Grafton Avenue. The Michaels' house was not very different from what he had expected: a standard detached house, probably built in the 'fifties, with a tiny, neat front garden and no character whatsoever. The same was true of all the houses in the street: suburbia personified. The only relief from the architectural monotony was a small square of public garden on the opposite corner of the avenue. Geoffrey walked in it for a bit, his eye on Roger's house, but there was no sign of life.

Was Roger a pub man, he wondered. Yes, it did sound as if Roger was probably a pub man. Men with streams of jokes usually were. Two streets away, Geoffrey could see the outlines of a 'thirties roadhouse, Brewery Anonymous in style. Could that be Roger Michaels' local? It seemed worth a try.

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It was still a good half hour before the lunchtime rush and the landlord was ready for a leisurely gossip.

Thinking of moving round here, was he? Well, he always did say you couldn't find a nicer area. Lovely houses—well, he would have seen that. Nice people, too, if it came to that—a very good *class*, if Geoffrey knew what he meant. What line of business was Geoffrey in himself? Schoolmastering? *Head*master! Well, he could practically guarantee he would fit in perfectly. Did he have any connections in this area?

"Oh, no," said Geoffrey airily, "not really. Though I've just remembered I do know a chap who lives around here somewhere. Man called Roger Michaels."

"Roger! One of the best. He's one of our regulars. Well, not regular, because these days he's up north from Monday to Friday. But he'll be in on Friday or Saturday, and he and his wife come in on Sunday lunchtime without fail. Come in about half past twelve, have a couple, then leave about half past one, when the roast is done."

"Great chap, Roger," said Geoffrey with painfully assumed heartiness.

"Lovely man. Really funny. I'd say he was a real wit. He gets a little circle round him when he comes in here and he has them splitting their sides."

"Bit of a lad, too, I believe," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, we wouldn't know about that round here," said the landlord with professional caution. "While he's home, his wife keeps him on a very tight leash. Between you and me—" he leaned forward over the bar and hushed his voice "—she has the reputation of being a bit of a b-i-t-c-h. Mind you, if he has his fling now and then I'm not alto*geth*er surprised."

"No?"

The landlord lowered his voice again.

"Couple round here had their Silver Wedding. Went to the Savoy for a bit of a splash. They saw Roger there with a woman—a real corker, so they said. 'Course, it could have been his sister." The landlord smirked. "Nothing was said. Just one or two dirty snickers. The fact is, his lady wife's not greatly liked. And you can say what you want about Roger, he's a man people take to."

Then the bar began to fill up.

Geoffrey went back to the roadhouse on Sunday at lunchtime. The bar was full this time and he was served by a barmaid. He stationed himself by the window. From here he couldn't see the Michaels'

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house, but he could see the end of Grafton Avenue. Most of the couples who came for a drink drove, but surely the Michaelses would not. At about half past midday, he saw a couple walking from Grafton Avenue. They were apparently affectionate, but there was something forced about it, even from a distance. He walked like a man with something on his mind. She took his hand in hers, but that only increased the sense of strain. As they approached the pub, Geoffrey downed his drink and escaped out the back.

In the car, he found he was drenched with sweat. That, certainly, had not been the time or the place for an encounter. He had to get Michaels on his own, in some place where neither of them was known. But how could that be arranged?

On Sunday night, Geoffrey rang his Deputy Head. He found he just couldn't face school in the morning, he said. He'd intended coming in, but somehow the thought of school assembly, with all the children looking at him, was more than he could bear. He might slip in inconspicuously later in the day, or he'd be there without fail on Tuesday. His Deputy was very sympathetic and said she quite understood.

It was very dark when Geoffrey left the house on Monday morning—still night, in fact. Roger Michaels' time of departure for the north could be anything from six onwards. In fact, Geoffrey was in position in the little patch of public garden by five past. He had left his car just round the corner from Grafton Avenue.

At about twenty past, a light came on in the landing of Number 26, and soon there seemed to be lights on in the back of the house downstairs. What was he doing? Making himself coffee, or making himself breakfast? Geoffrey hoped it was the former. When he had thought about their encounter, he had envisaged it taking place in some motorway cafeteria where Roger had stopped for breakfast. Daylight broke over Surbiton. He must have made himself something to eat. But even so, he would stop for a cup of coffee, surely, at some stage in his journey?

It was just after seven when the front door opened. Geoffrey saw Michaels' back as he closed the door, then a side view as he walked to the garage. Middle height, little moustache, firm walk. Geoffrey fingered his car keys as he heard the garage doors opened. Then another wait. What was the man *doing?* Finally a car started and began backing out.

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The rush of blood to Geoffrey's head was so blinding he had to lean against a tree. It was a silver-blue Honda. There it stood, in the middle of the road, as Roger got out to close the garage doors. A silver-blue Honda. He had killed her. Deliberately run her down. The coincidence was too glaring to believe otherwise. Suddenly decisive, Geoffrey ran to his car, started it, and when the Honda had driven past silently put it into gear and followed at a safe distance.

All the way, through suburb after dreary suburb and towards the M1, Geoffrey was thinking. He had tried to throw her over and she had not taken it lying down. She had got troublesome. She had threatened to go to his wife. He couldn't imagine Helen being troublesome, but then the whole of Helen's other life was something he could only conceive of by imagining a quite different sort of woman. She was a woman of forty, hopelessly in love with a younger man. A desperate woman will adopt desperate means. He, on the other hand, had just been having a fling on the side. His marriage was important to him. Why? Did the wife have money?

Helen had been driving down between town and home, on a stretch of highway where a spurt of speed was possible. She had been giving her cookery class as usual—something she always did on a Tuesday night. Anyone could have known this, but it was something Michaels would doubtless have known very well. He must have driven down from the north, parked there, waited for her to pass, then driven into her at speed and driven on. Geoffrey felt that great, choking well of anger in him, still as strong as when he had seen the car.

At last they got to the motorway. Roger was not a fast-lane man, Geoffrey was relieved to find. He kept on the inside, driving carefully. Was he naturally a fast-lane man but one with something on his mind? On and on they went, towards the Midlands, towards the north. He was not going to stop! Geoffrey felt a growing surge of frustration, pushing his anger to boiling point. He was not going to stop! Where was he going to be able to confront him—tell him face to face he knew what he had done?

They were nearing a flyover. On an impulse Geoffrey accelerated. He drew level with the Honda and stayed level. Roger was driving steadily, carefully. A flicker crossed his face. He had realized that the car beside him in the next lane had been there too long. He turned his head and saw Geoffrey's face looking directly at him. Geoffrey saw his jaw drop. Michaels had recognized him. So Helen had shown him pictures. His jaw was working. He seemed about to say something. Then all of a sudden, his car was out of control,

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swerving to the left, off the road, through the flyover's safety barrier and down to the ground or road beneath. Geoffrey's last view had been of a face crazed with terror.

He drove on till he came to a lay-by. He sat for some minutes with his head in his hands. He had done nothing. His car had not touched the Honda. And yet—what had been his motive in driving up beside him, staying beside him in the second lane? To get a good look? Or with the subconscious desire that something like this would happen?

At any rate, some kind of justice had been done. Ten minutes later, almost cool again, Geoffrey drove to the next junction, then turned and headed south. There were police and AA men on the flyover, and down below he could hear the shriek of an ambulance.

Geoffrey drove to Surbiton on the next Saturday to buy a local paper. There was a brief notice of the accident, with the news that it had involved no other deaths, though a passenger was injured in a car on the road below which had been slightly grazed by the falling Honda. Geoffrey was relieved it was not worse. He went back to Surbiton the next Saturday, and the one after that, but it was not till the third Saturday that he found a report of the inquest.

The coroner, before accepting a verdict of accidental death, set out the facts admirably. The dead man was still young, was happily married, and had quite recently embarked on a promising career with a first-rate company. Unfortunately, his job necessitated a great deal of traveling. There was no evidence that Mr. Michaels had been drinking, either on the morning or the night before. Nor was there any evidence that his judgment could have been impaired for any other reason—for example, drugs. The relevant facts were that Mr. Michaels had not had a great deal of sleep the night before and had begun his long journey early in the morning. It was clear that the accident had been caused by a momentary lapse in concentration.

The coroner also noted the fact that in her evidence Roger Michaels' widow had suggested that a contributory factor in the accident was the fact that her husband was driving a car to which he was not accustomed. His company Volvo was in the garage for an extensive refit and he had been forced to take her car.

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RUSSELL BANKS

"I saw you walking home from the tannery the other day," Doctor Wickshaw said, "and I said to myself, Now that's a woman who shouldn't be alone in the world."

She was not alone in the world, she reminded him, mentioning her four sons.

A condensation of Russell Banks' fluid and saddening story, which originally appeared in Fiction *Magazine as "The Child Screams and Looks Back at You" and was reprinted in the collection of his stories,* Trailerpark. *Mr. Banks has won numerous awards and prizes for his work, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships, Ingram Merrill Award, The St. Lawrence Award for Short Fiction, O. Henry and Best American Short Story Awards . . .*

DOCTOR WICKSHAW

by RUSSELL BANKS

Marcelle called her boys from the kitchen to hurry and get dressed for school. One of these mornings she was not going to keep after them like this and they would all be late for school and she would not write a note to the teacher to explain anything, she didn't give a damn if the teacher kept them after school, because it would teach them a lesson once and for all, and that lesson was when she woke them in the morning they had to hurry and get dressed and make their beds and get the hell out here to the kitchen and eat their breakfasts and brush their teeth and get the hell out

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the door to school so she could get dressed and eat her breakfast and go to work.

There were four of them, the four sons of Marcelle and Richard Chagnon. Joel was the oldest at twelve, and then, separated by little more than nine months, came Raymond, Maurice, and Charles. The father had moved out, had been thrown out of the apartment by Marcelle's younger brother Steve and one of Steve's friends nearly nine years ago, when the youngest, Charles, was still an infant, and though for several years Richard had tried to convince Marcelle she should let him move back in with them and let him be her husband and the father of his four sons again, she had never allowed it, for his way of being a husband and father was to get drunk and beat her and the older boys and then to wake ashamed and beg their forgiveness.

For years she had forgiven him, because to her when you forgive someone you make it possible for that person to change, and the boys also forgave him—they were, after all, her sons, too, and she had taught them, in their dealings with each other, to forgive. If you don't forgive someone who has hurt you, he can't change into a new person. He is stuck in his life with you at the point where he hurt you. But her husband and their father, Richard, after five years of it, had come to seem incapable of using their forgiveness in any way that allowed him to stop hurting them, so finally one night she had sent her oldest boy, Joel, who was then only four and a half years old, out the door and down the dark stairs to the street, down the street to the tenement where her brother Steve lived with his girl friend, and Joel had found Steve sitting at the kitchen table drinking beer with a friend and had said to him, "Come and keep my daddy from hitting my mommy!"

That night for Marcelle marked the end of the period of forgiveness, for she had permitted outsiders, her brother and his friend, to see how badly her husband Richard behaved. By that act, she had ceased to protect her husband, and you cannot forgive someone you will not protect. Richard never perceived or understood that shift, just as all those years he had never perceived or understood what it meant to be protected and forgiven. If you don't know what you've got when you've got it, you won't know what you've lost when you've lost it.

Marcelle was Catholic and even though she was not a diligent Catholic she was a loyal one, and she never remarried, which is not to say that over the years she did not now and again fall in love,

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once even with a married man, only briefly, however, until she became strong enough to reveal her affair to Father Brautigan, after which she had broken off with the man, to the relief of her sons, for they had not liked the way he had come sneaking around at odd hours to see their mother and talk with her in hushed tones in the kitchen until very late, when the lights would go off and an hour or two later he would leave. When in the morning the children got up and came out to the kitchen for breakfast, they would talk in low voices, as if the married man were still in the apartment and asleep in their mother's bed, and she would have deep circles under her eyes and would stir her coffee slowly and look out the window and now and then quietly remind them to hurry or they'd be late for school.

They were more comfortable when she was hollering at them, standing at the door to their bedroom, her hands on her hips, her dressing gown flapping open as she whirled and stomped back to the kitchen, embarrassing her slightly, for beneath her dressing gown she wore men's long underwear, so that, by the time they got out to the kitchen themselves, her dressing gown would have been pulled back tightly around her and tied at the waist, and all they could see of the long underwear beneath it would be the top button at her throat, which she would try to cover casually with one hand while she set their breakfasts before them with the other.

On this morning, however, only three of her sons appeared at the table, dressed for school, slumping grumpily into their chairs, for it was a grey, wintry day in early December, barely light outside. The oldest, Joel, had not come out with them, and she lost her temper, slammed three plates of scrambled eggs and toast down in front of the others, and fairly jogged back to the bedroom, stalked to the narrow bed by the wall where the boy slept, and yanked the covers away, to expose the boy, curled up on his side, eyes wide open, his face flushed and sweating, his hands clasped together as if in prayer. Horrified, she looked down at the gangly boy, and she saw him dead and quickly lay the covers back over him, gently straightening the blanket and top sheet. Then, slowly, she sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked his hot forehead, brushing his limp blond hair back, feeling beneath his jawbone as if for a pulse, touching his cheeks with the smooth backside of her cool hand.

"Tell me how you feel, honey," she said to the boy. He didn't answer her. His tongue came out and touched his dry lips and went quickly back inside his mouth. "Don't worry, honey," she said, and

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she got up from the bed. "It's probably the flu, that's all. I'll take your temperature and maybe call Doctor Wickshaw, and he'll tell me what to do. If you're too sick, I'll stay home from the tannery today. All right?" she asked and took a tentative step away from the bed. The room was dark and cluttered with clothing and toys, model airplanes and boats, tools, hockey equipment, portable radios, photographs of athletes and singers.

"Okay," the boy said weakly.

Doctor Wickshaw, a man in his middle forties, portly but in good physical condition, with horn-rimmed glasses and a Vandyke beard, told Marcelle that her son Joel probably had the flu, it was going around, half the school was out with it. "Keep him in bed a few days and give him lots of liquids," he instructed her after examining the boy. He made housecalls, if the call for help came during morning hours or if it was truly an emergency. Afternoons he was at his office, and evenings he made rounds at the Concord Hospital, twenty-five miles away.

Marcelle asked what she should do about the fever, one hundred four degrees, and he told her to give the boy three aspirins now and two more every three or four hours. She saw the man to the door, and as he passed her in the narrow hallway he placed one hand on her rump, and he said to the tall, broad-shouldered woman, "How are things with you, Marcelle? I saw you walking home from the tannery the other day, and I said to myself, Now that's a woman who shouldn't be alone in the world." He smiled into her bladelike face, the face of a large, powerful bird, and showed her his excellent teeth.

His hand was still pressed against her rump and they stood face to face, for she was as tall as he. She was not alone in the world, she reminded him, mentioning her four sons. The doctor's hand slipped to her thigh. She did not move. "But you get lonely," he told her. She had grey eyes and her face was filled with fatigue, tiny lines that broke her smooth pale skin like the cracks in a ceramic jar that long ago had broken and had been glued back together again, as good as new, they say, and even stronger than before, but nevertheless fragile-looking now, and brittle perhaps, more likely to break a second time, it seemed, than when it had not been broken at all.

"Yes," she said, "I get lonely," and with both hands she reached up to her temples and pushed her dark hair back, and holding onto the sides of her own head she leaned it forward and kissed the man

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for several seconds, pushing at him with her mouth until he pulled away, red-faced, his hand at his side now, and moved self-consciously sideways toward the door.

"I'll come by tomorrow," he said in a low voice. "To see how Joel's doing."

She smiled slightly and nodded. "If he's better," she said, "I'll be at work. But the door is always open." From the doorway, he asked if she came home for lunch. "Yes," she said, "when one of the boys is home sick, I do. Otherwise, no." He said that he might be here then, and she said, "Fine," and reached forward and closed the door on him.

That night the boy's fever went higher, to one hundred five degrees, and Marcelle moved the younger boys into her own room so that she could sleep in the bed next to the sick boy's. She bathed him in cool water with washcloths, coaxed him into swallowing aspirin with orange juice, and sat on the edge of the bed next to his and watched him sleep, although she knew he was not truly sleeping, he was merely lying there on his side, his legs out straight now, silent and breathing rapidly, like an injured dog, stunned and silently healing itself. But the boy was not healing himself, he was hourly growing worse. She could tell that.

She tried to move him so that she could straighten the sheets, but when she touched him he cried out in pain, as if his back or neck were broken, and, frightened, she drew back from him. She wanted to call Doctor Wickshaw, and several times she got up and walked out to the kitchen where the telephone hung on the wall like a large black insect, and each time she stood for a few seconds before the instrument, remembered the doctor in the hallway and what she had let him promise her with his eyes, remembered then what he had told her about her son's illness, and turned and walked back to the boy and tried again to cool him with damp cloths. Her three other sons slept peacefully through the night and knew nothing of what happened until morning came.

When her son went into convulsions, Marcelle did not at first know it, for his voice was clear and what he said made sense. Suddenly, he spoke loudly and in complete sentences.

"Ma, I'm not alone. I know that, and it helps me not be scared. For a while I thought I was alone," he went on, and she sat upright and listened alertly to him in the darkness of the bedroom. "And

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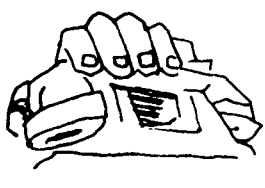
then I started to see things and think maybe there was someone else in the room here with me, and then I was scared, Ma. Because I didn't know for sure whether I was alone or not. But now I know I'm not alone, and knowing it helps me not be scared." She said that she was glad, because she thought he was talking about her presence in the room, and she took his recognition of her presence as a sign that the fever had broken.

But when she reached out in the darkness and touched his neck, it was burning, like an empty, black pot left over a fire, and she almost cried out in pain, and might have, had the child not commenced to shout at her, bellowing at her as if she were a large, ugly animal that he wished to send cowering into the far corner of his room.

Doctor Wickshaw hurried into the bedroom and this time knew that the boy had contracted meningitis, probably spinal meningitis, and he also knew that it was too late to save the boy, that if he did not die in the next few days he would suffer irreparable damage to his central nervous system.

Marcelle knew that by her son's death she was now a lost soul, and she did not weep. She went grimly about her appointed rounds. She raised her three remaining sons, and each of them, in his turn, forgave her and protected her. The one that died, Joel, the oldest, never forgave her, never shielded her from judgment, never let grace fall on her. Late at night, when she lay in bed alone, she knew this to the very bottom of her mind, and the knowledge was the lamp that illuminated the mystery and the miracle of her remaining days.



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a *NEW* Kate Fansler story by

AMANDA CROSS

"I've come to hire you as a detective," the child told Kate. "I have money. My father says you probably couldn't find a herd of buffalo in a field covered with snow, but I figure if he doesn't like you you must be good."

A fine, dry story about a precocious young girl, her dog, and Kate Fansler, who told her niece the worst fate she ever inflicted on a child was to avoid it—from Amanda Cross, whose latest novel, from Dutton, is wonderfully titled No Word from Winifred . . .

ARRIE AND JASPER

by AMANDA CROSS

My aunt Kate Fansler doesn't care for children. I'm her niece, but I never really got to know her till we ran into each other when I was a student at Harvard. It's true my cousin Leo spent a summer with her, and lived with her a year or so when he was in high school, but he wasn't really a child in high school, and during that summer she had a hired companion for him and sent him to day camp besides. Kate always refused to become defensive about this. "I know it's an eccentric attitude," she admitted, "but not a dangerous one. The worst fate I've ever inflicted on any child is to avoid it. As it happens, however," she added, "I did once more or less solve a case for a child. Do you think that will serve to redeem me in the eyes of those with maternal instincts?"

Kate was in her office at the university, about to conclude that her office hour was over and the thought of a martini with Reed

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could be realistically contemplated, when she heard a timid knock. She looked through the glass in the top half of her door and saw a silhouette reaching only a few inches above where the glass began. She opened the door to find herself confronting a girl child wearing a school uniform, glasses, braces, and a frown. Kate stared at the child so long she asked if she might come in. Kate apologized and ushered her in, closing the door.

"Forgive me," Kate said. "I was just a bit startled. You look rather young for graduate school. Or even for college, if it comes to that. Are you lost?"

"I've come to hire you as a detective," the child said. "I have money. My father says you probably couldn't find a herd of buffalo in a field covered with snow, but I figure if he doesn't like you you must be good."

"My dear young woman," Kate said, dropping back into the chair behind her desk, "I don't know which misapprehension to confront first. But, in the order in which you offered them, I'm not a detective, either private or police—they work at that job a lot harder than I do. I have detected from time to time, but I never take money, it might cloud the fine, careless rapture of the adventure. I don't know who your father is, and I'm somewhat concerned that you hold his opinion in such low regard."

You might think all this verbiage would have frightened the kid, but she held her ground admirably. "I hope I didn't offend you about the money," she said, returning her wallet to her pocket. "I would be very glad of your help."

"It doesn't sound to me as though your father would approve of your seeking my help, nor of my offering it. Who is your father? Someone I know?"

"His name is Professor Witherspoon," the child said, assured that his name was sufficient to establish his identity and credentials in Kate's eyes. She was quite right. Witherspoon was a member of Kate's department, and to say that he and Kate never saw eye to eye on anything was to put their relationship in its least emotional terms. Kate was frank to admit that she could never decide if he was a monster or a lunatic. The best that could be said on her side was that most of the department agreed with her. Kate eyed his progeny with some dismay.

"It sounds to me as though I'm the last person you should come to. Am I to gather that your dislike of your father is sufficient to recommend to you someone he despises?"

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The girl had no trouble with this one, either, merely nodding. "I think he's the most awful man I know," she added. "I didn't come to you just for that reason, though. My sister took a class with you, and she considered you worthy of recommendation."

"Well," Kate said with some relief, "I'm glad to hear there is one member of your family that you like. But I can't say I ever remember having a Witherspoon in my class. I don't remember all my students' names, but I have a feeling I would have noticed hers."

"Roxanna has taken our mother's name—Albright. I'm going to do the same as soon as I can. I'll have to wait at least until I leave high school. My sister is a lot older than me. She's very smart and very beautiful; not like me."

"You look fine to me," Kate said. She meant it. Kate is the best disregarder of beauty in any conventional sense I've ever met, and if a person is glamorous or studiously well dressed, they have to go a long way to gain her trust.

"I don't look like my mother," the child said with evident regret. "Also, I'm strabismic and have an overbite. Put differently," she added, "my eyes have difficulty focusing on the same object, and my upper and lower jaws fail to meet properly. I think it's because I was such a disappointment. I was unexpected, you see, but they hoped—that is, my father hoped—that at least I would be a boy. I wasn't," she added sadly, in case Kate had any doubt.

Had the kid but known it, she had picked the quickest way to Kate's sympathies. I think Kate asked her what she wanted in order to get her off the topic of her drawbacks.

"I want you to find my dog," she said.

About this time, I'm sure, Kate was beginning to think of that martini with something close to passion. "I wouldn't know how to begin to look for a lost dog in this city," she said. "I'm afraid it may have been snatched by someone, or else wandered off. Have you tried the ASPCA?"

"He wasn't lost, he was stolen. And not on the streets, out of the apartment. The doorman saw someone leaving with Jasper under his arm. And the apartment wasn't broken into. Which means it was an inside job."

Kate took the bull by the horns (the same bull, according to Witherspoon, which she would be capable of overlooking in a china shop). "Do you suspect your father?" she asked.

"I don't know who to suspect." The kid sighed. "But Jasper meant,

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means, an awful lot to me." And she began to cry. She raised her glasses and wiped her eyes on her sleeve.

"What kind of dog was he?" Kate asked for something to say. "I gather not a mastiff if someone could carry him out."

"He's a Jack Russell terrier. The breed isn't yet accepted by the American Kennel Club, though it is by the English. Jack Russell terriers are small, very low to the ground, white with brown faces and ears, and tough as anything. Don't you see, it had to be someone Jasper knew, someone he thought was taking him out. He loves to go out," she added, sniffing, "but he's a fierce watchdog with anyone he doesn't know."

"You haven't told me your name," Kate said.

"Arabella. It was my father's mother's name. She was a suffragette who chained herself to fences. My father hated her. People like my sister call me Arrie."

Of course it occurred to Kate that the kid needed a therapist, not a detective, and she also probably needed a new father and a new dog. "What about your mother?" she asked. "You haven't mentioned her."

"She's away trying to stop drinking. She's much younger than my father. She was a graduate student. She's his second wife. We have two much older stepsisters from his first marriage. My father has never been able to produce a son, to his sorrow. I hope my mother gets better. The man where she is says the whole family ought to help, but my father hasn't the time. My sister and I went down there once." She trailed off.

Poor Kate didn't really know what to do. She wanted to help the kid, but there didn't seem to be any evident practical course of assistance. Arrie seemed to understand her dilemma. "You could think about it," she said. "My sister says you're very good at thinking about things. Only try not to think too long because I'm very worried about poor Jasper. He can be very trying to people who don't understand him."

"And with that," Kate said, relating the scene to Reed over her second martini, her first having been required simply to calm her down and stop her babbling, "she left with a lot more dignity than I was exhibiting. What the hell am I to do? Could you call some old pal from the DA's office to undertake a dog search on the side?"

Kate's husband answered her real question. "The doorman saw someone leave with the dog under his arm, as I understand it. The

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dog wasn't struggling, indicating that it wasn't being nabbed by a stranger but by someone it knew. You better find out more about the family."

"It doesn't sound like a family I want to know much more about. Perhaps we should offer to adopt Arrie and get her another Jasper."

"You have got to begin drinking less," Reed said with asperity. "We are a happy, adult couple, let me remind you—you have no trouble remembering it when you're sober. You aren't going to turn maternal on me after all these years?"

"Fear not. Just wait till *you* meet Arrie. Not to mention her father, the esteemed Professor Witherspoon."

"What is he a professor of, exactly?"

"Exactly is the word. He deals in manuscripts, the older the better, and in a foreign tongue. There is nothing about them he doesn't know, to do him justice. The trouble is, he doesn't know anything else. Confront him with an idea and he turns into a dangerous, oversized porcupine with a very loud voice. He detests every new discipline or theory or concept of teaching, and if he had his way the first woman faculty member would never have been hired. He's done his best to keep our numbers down. Women students, needless to say, are a different matter. He carries on with them in a manner designed to give sexual harassment a new name. Women students should be grateful to sit at his feet and submit themselves in other suitable poses; he doesn't want them as colleagues. He is also pompous and leering, but we might as well keep this discussion on an impersonal basis, as is my wont."

"That fills out the picture without getting us anywhere, wouldn't you say?"

"I've *been* saying, ever since I got home. What, dear man, is my next move?"

"Something will occur to you," Reed said with confidence.

The next day, Arrie's sister Roxanna Albright phoned Kate's office for an appointment. With enormous relief, Kate agreed to see her. Roxanna, being beautiful and older, could be counted on not to get to Kate in the same way Arrie had. No doubt they could arrive at a practical conclusion to the whole problem, insofar as it allowed of one. Perhaps it would be best to begin by advertising for Jasper, hanging plaintive signs on lampposts, that kind of thing.

Roxanna, whom Kate had unsuccessfully attempted to call to mind from some years back, exceeded all expectations. She was gor-

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geous—there was no other word. She must, Kate thought, have undergone some sort of transformation in the intervening years; not to have noticed her would have been like overlooking Garbo.

"I don't know whether to apologize or implore," Roxanna said when they had both sat down. "Arrie didn't consult me before coming. We'd talked about you once at dinner and I'd expressed my admiration. The fact that you had successfully undertaken some detective commissions was mentioned."

"As well as the opinion that I couldn't find a herd of buffalo in a white field; I know. But does the fact that your father despises me really qualify me to help Arrie? If so, I hope you'll tell me how."

"Oh, dear. Tact is something Arrie doesn't so much scorn as ignore."

"I quite agree with her," Kate said. "Tact should never interfere with one's getting at the facts. Your father, for example, lacks not tact but any concept of what the facts are."

"How well you put it." Roxanna paused as though considering how to go on. "I think the world of Arrie," she said. "Arrie's convinced she's an ugly duckling; I talk of a swan, which in time she will become. Arrie's going to do just fine. But, except for me, she doesn't get much undemanding affection, or really any affection at all. Except from Jasper, of course, which is what made this so awful. Jasper's a very responsive dog—he and Arrie have a relationship I can only call passionate.

"That's why I wanted to come in pérson to tell you that he's back, and apparently no worse for his strange adventure. We got a note, printed capitals on plain paper, saying he could be found at five P.M. tied to the gate of the playground at Seventy-second Street and Fifth Avenue. Of course Arrie was there on the dot, and so was Jasper. I've really only come to thank you for your kindness, not throwing her out, listening to her. It was a horrible three days. Even my father's glad the dog's back, and that's saying a good deal. You've been very kind."

"There was no ransom asked? No demand at all?"

"None. My father pointed out to Arrie that if she went ahead of time, as she wanted to do, the kidnaper might see her and not return Jasper. It's the only helpful thing he's said in living memory, so I suppose this whole affair is remarkable for that alone." Roxanna rose.

"I know," she said, "that Arrie will write to you and thank you for your sympathy and kindness. I thank you, too . . ."

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The next day, however, brought not a letter from Arrie, but Arrie herself. She had waited patiently during Kate's office hour until the last of the students had gone. She had Jasper with her, hidden in a very large sack. She let him out in Kate's office, explaining that she had brought him because she hardly dared leave him alone if she didn't absolutely have to, and because she thought Kate might like to meet him, having been so kind about his disappearance.

Jasper was a bundle of energy, perhaps ten inches high and eighteen inches long. He looked as though he could take on with ease anything five times his size. Having dashed about with relief at being out of the sack, necessitated by the university's No Dogs signs, Jasper sat down at Arrie's feet and looked up at her adoringly. Kate began to feel she was being forced to watch a Disney movie that threatened never to end. Arrie, perhaps sensing this, became very businesslike.

"Jasper and I are not here only to thank you," she said. "We wish to engage your services to find out who took him. Unless I know, you see," she added, "I'll never be able to feel safe in leaving him again. I'm sure you can understand that."

Kate was silent, which wasn't—as she was the first to admit—her usual part in a conversation. She had to recognize a clear reluctance to abandon this child to an additional unknown. Her father was clearly as reliable as a lottery and her sister affectionate but hardly able, and certainly not obliged, to provide parental attentions. The dog seemed to be the only steady factor, and Kate understood that Arrie's desire for assurance was certainly justified. How, on the other hand, to provide it?

"I've come with a suggestion," Arrie said, reaching over to stroke Jasper, who sat expectantly—Kate doubted if the dog ever sat any other way—at her side. "My father is relieved that I have Jasper back. So is my sister. I think they'd be willing to agree if I invited you to dinner."

"To case the joint?" Kate asked. Dinner with Professor Witherspoon, Roxanna, and Arrie, to name only the minimum cast of characters, struck Kate as likely to be bizarre. Apart from everything else, Witherspoon was the sort of man who, alone with three females, becomes either autocratic or flirtatious, neither of them modes dear to Kate's heart. On the other hand—

Arrie had smiled at Kate's question. "Tomorrow night?" she suggested. "Seven o'clock? I've written down the address and phone number. Jasper and I will be grateful."

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Kate nodded. What else was there to do? Not for the first time, she thanked the gods—Kate, when not agnostic, was firmly polytheistic—that she had very little to do with children in this life.

At least one of Kate's trepidations about the dinner chez Witherspoon was allayed immediately upon her entrance: there were two men in addition to the professor. At least that cause of Witherspoon's pontification or sprightliness had been removed. Roxanna introduced a young man almost as gorgeous in his way as she was in hers—Desmond Elliott, an actor. What possibly else, Kate thought, shaking hands. Arrie she greeted with warmth and a wink. Jasper had been, it appeared, exiled for the duration. The other guest was an older man, who, it became immediately clear, was allied with Witherspoon and against the others. Why, Kate wondered, was that so clear? Equally clear, somewhat less inexplicably, was the fact that Mr. Johnson was a lawyer, who had joined them for dinner when Arrie's invitation to Kate superceded his planned dinner a deux with Witherspoon.

The professor had decided upon graciousness. He was the host, and while in his house Kate would be treated like a woman guest, neither more nor less. With relief, Kate sank into a chair, accepted a drink, and embarked upon a sea of meaningless chitchat. This torture was somewhat ameliorated by Desmond Elliott's amusing account of the actor's life—made up, it appeared, in equal parts of being a waiter and performing in small, unprofitable companies of great artistic integrity so far off Broadway as to be in another state.

Roxanna was a pleasant hostess, keeping an eye on everyone's comfort but not buzzing about or insisting upon anything. When they moved in to dinner, she brought things gracefully to the table. She and Desmond were the mainstays of the conversation, although Witherspoon made some acidic comments to Kate about their department which Kate did her best to ignore. It is difficult, while eating your host's meat, to convey to him that you disagree with everything he is saying and everything he is likely to say. They finally reached the blessed subject of the university's administration, in disdain for which even sworn enemies could agree.

As the company returned to the living room for coffee, Arrie asked Kate if she would like to say hello to Jasper. Kate eagerly agreed, and followed Arrie down the hall to a closed door, behind which sharp barks of anticipation could be heard. "Quiet, Jasper," Arrie said, revealing a history of complaints, from whom it was not hard

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to guess. "Up." The dog danced on his short hind legs and Arrie took from her pocket a chunk of chicken breast. She tossed it into the air and Jasper caught and swallowed it in one grateful gulp, then sat, hoping for more.

"You have a nice room," Kate said.

"Yes. I used to have a tiny room off the kitchen, but Roxanna took that since she doesn't really live here most of the time. There's really just me and my father now."

"And Jasper," Kate said, it being the only cheerful fact that occurred to her. "Did your father buy him for you?" she added hopefully.

"No. Roxanna did. Dad said I couldn't keep him. But then he changed his mind. Roxanna made him."

"Desmond's nice," Kate observed. It *was* odd how conversation deserted her in the presence of the very young.

"Very nice. I'm glad he was here. I don't care for Mr. Johnson."

"Does he come often?"

"No, he's never really been here before. I've just talked to him on the phone when he calls my father. Roxanna says he's simultaneously illiterate and imperious." Kate tried not to grin, and failed. They laughed together, and Jasper rose to his hind legs, joining in.

"I still need to know who took him," Arrie said before they rejoined the others.

Reed had promised that something would occur to Kate, but all that occurred to her was gossip. And for departmental gossip, the ultimate source was Richard Frankel. Dean Rosovsky, when he retired from his high post at Harvard, reported in *Harvard Magazine* that the first duty of a dean was to listen to gossip. Kate, not to be outdone by any dean, took the advice to heart. Richard, reached by telephone, was graciously pleased to make an appointment the following day for lunch.

Kate contemplated his face across the luncheon table with pleasure. Richard combined the best features of an imp and a youthfully aging and gay (in all senses of the word) uncle. He was, in fact, quite heterosexual and a convinced bachelor, having convinced everyone of this except himself. He still hoped to meet the right woman in the next day or so and launch himself on a satisfactory career of marriage and fatherhood. Like a number of people Kate had observed over the years, Richard, marvelously suited to his life and vigorously happy, was unaware that his deep satisfaction arose in

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part from the delusion that he was abjectly in need of passionate love, babies, and a deep and lasting relationship. Kate liked him enormously.

She did not immediately ask about Witherspoon. To have evinced that much interest would have started Richard's investigative motors and Kate did not wish to reveal her relationship with Arrie. But it was easy to work the conversation around to Witherspoon, whom Richard, together with the greater part of the department, despised with a vigor only mitigated by the pleasure they got in talking about how awful he was. Witherspoon, Kate was forced to realize, had provided a good deal of pleasure in his curmudgeonly life, none of it intended.

Richard knew all about the wife tucked away in a nearer version of Betty Ford's detoxification facility. "Before my time, of course, but the usual story. He pursued her with tales of his unsympathetic wife—now she's the unsympathetic wife. They never learn, poor dears. One hopes the graduate students these days are too smart to marry him, if not quite smart enough to dodge entirely. I met the wife once. He had me to dinner in the early days, before I turned out to be modern altogether. Obviously a lady, and punishing him and herself for her stupid mistake. They have two daughters, an absolutely mouthwatering creature called Roxanna and an afterthought called Arabella. The names are enough to give you an idea of the marriage. It's widely assumed that Arabella isn't his child."

Kate stared at him. "On what grounds?" she finally asked.

"I think it was the poor thing's final attempt to bolt, before she drowned herself in alcohol reinforced by prescription drugs. Considering his record of fornication and adultery, you'd think he'd have turned a blind eye, but not our Witherspoon."

"Why not?"

"Kate, my sweet, you don't seem your usual quick-witted self, if you'll forgive my observing it. Must you go on grunting monosyllabic questions?"

"I'm sorry, Richard. I'm always astonished at how much life is like prime-time soap operas."

"Which I'm certain you never watch. They are unreal only in the way outrageous situations follow hard upon each other and in the luxury of the surroundings. Actually, they are otherwise just like life, if you're a shit like Witherspoon—which of course most of them are. Have you some special interest in him? A renewed fascination with manuscripts?"

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Kate laughed. "If I could take the smallest interest in manuscripts, it wouldn't be renewed. It would be a new and sudden aberration. Actually, I had dinner there the other evening and was overwhelmed with curiosity. Roxanna used to be a student of mine, and she asked me." Richard would wonder why she hadn't mentioned this in the first place. The reason was clear to Kate: it had entailed lying.

"Ah—I wondered why your interest was so suddenly awakened. The rumor is that he now wants a divorce and most of what there is of her worldly goods. In exchange, he'll pretend to relinquish with infinite sorrow custody of Arabella."

"Do you mean he'll get her to pay him alimony?"

"Don't ask me the details, but that's often how it works out these days. The woman gets the children and the man gets the property."

"Surely the woman gets to keep what she brought into the marriage."

"No doubt," Richard drily said, "but since all this wife brought in was her misguided affection for Witherspoon that's unlikely to serve her very well. Of course, she may have some family bonds stashed away, in which case he'll do his best to get them. The man can always afford the better lawyers, alas."

"No doubt the men look at it differently," Kate said, her mind elsewhere.

"We certainly can guess how Witherspoon looks at it. And he's got two daughters from the former marriage, both unlikely to have great sympathy with the poor alcoholic. Maybe Roxanna and Arabella will come to her defense. I had the most awful row with him, you know, not too long ago. That's why it's an additional pleasure to contemplate his absolute awfulness. He worked every angle to get tenure for one of his acolytes, a twerp with his nose in manuscripts and his brain in a sling. Witherspoon got his way, of course, and I was marked down as an enemy—a mark not of distinction, since there are so many of us, but of honor. The only good part of the story is that the twerp left to devote himself wholly to some manuscript collection. Did Witherspoon behave himself at dinner?"

"Oh, yes. The older daughter is very gracious and I like the younger one. I'm surprised the wife had the gumption to have a love affair."

"Its end was no doubt the inevitable last straw. Witherspoon made no bones about the fact that if the child had been a boy he would have forgiven everything. He's that kind of monster."

"Do you think he's really the father?"

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"God knows. Roxanna is pretty definitely his, and she's gorgeous, so who has an opinion about genes? Of course, the wife was pretty luscious in those days—he'd never have bothered otherwise, that being all women are good for."

"Do you know anything about the lover? He sounds mysterious, like the tutor who might have been Edith Wharton's father."

"I know the scuttlebutt. He was thin with glasses and buck teeth, and very sweet. He was an adjunct teacher in art history, which she dabbled in. I don't know what became of him. Gossip has it they used to walk around the campus holding hands. I feel sorry for her."

Kate was amazed, not for the first time, at the extent of her colleagues' interest in one another's lives. Richard was, of course, unofficial keeper of the gossip and since his heart was in the right place she was willing to decide that his was a valuable function. What Witherspoon would have thought of it was another question. Did she care what Witherspoon thought about anything, or only what he did?

What had he done, apart from being a failure as a human being and a father? Kate decided to walk for a while after bidding Richard a grateful farewell.

She wandered around the city streets, noticing dogs (no Jack Russell terriers) and the general air of menace which by now everyone in New York, and probably elsewhere, took for granted: it seemed the mark of an age. Compared to which, Kate told herself, the momentary absence of a dog was hardly to be counted. And yet that had been, somewhere along the family chain, a failure of trust which was how menace began. Was it Kant who said that trust was the basis of civilization?

Letting her attention wander unbidden over the cast of characters at that dinner, and in Richard's account of the Witherspoons, Kate found herself eventually at Central Park and East Seventy-second Street. She sat on a bench to observe the spot where Jasper had been tied when Arrie retrieved him. It was a well chosen location, easily approached and abandoned from four directions, sufficiently crowded with people and dogs entering and leaving the park to make one more man and dog unnoticed.

Man? A man had removed Jasper from the building, according to the doorman's report. Dogs were not allowed in the playground, so a number of them were tied to the entrance, waiting with accustomed patience or anxiety for their people on the other side of the fence.

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By the time Kate had to leave to meet her class, she had made up her mind.

"It is, of course, none of my business," Kate said to Roxanna as they had a drink before ordering their dinner. "That phrase is always a sign that someone thinks it is her business, or has determined to make it so. Do you mind?"

"Hardly," Roxanna said. "I used to wonder what it would be like to have dinner with Professor Fansler. Thank you for the privilege: my business is your business."

"Very graciously put. Perhaps you'd better order another drink."

"Oh, dear," Roxanna said.

"I intend nothing more sinister than blackmail," Kate said reassuringly.

"I know—on behalf of Arrie. Blackmail won't be necessary. From you, that is—I've already employed it on her behalf. Is that what you guessed?"

"It would hardly be fair to get you to tell me what happened and then claim to have guessed it all."

"Okay," Roxanna said. "You tell me. And I'll take that second drink. May I correct you as you go along?"

"Please do," Kate said. "My hope is that you'll end up assuring me about poor Jasper's safety."

Roxanna nodded.

"Your father, the revered Professor Witherspoon, has been after what money he can get out of your mother. Doubtless he has another young lady in tow. I say 'lady,' because I don't really think a *woman* would have anything to do with him. Did he try to retrieve from your mother something he had given her and now wanted to give to another? A ring? A brooch? It can't have been too big or Jasper wouldn't have swallowed it, however imbedded in a piece of meat. Although the way he gulps while dancing around on his hind legs, anything is possible."

"Not a ring," Roxanna said. "An emerald. He'd had it taken out of the ring and said he was going to get it reset. It's the most valuable thing my mother had—it was in her family for years. They may have pawned it, but they never sold it."

"He pretended to her it needed to be reset?"

"Nothing so civilized. She would have been suspicious at any kindly offer, I'm afraid. He talked her out of taking it to the detoxification place, said it might be stolen. She didn't believe him, but

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when he set his mind on something she didn't have a chance. I heard them arguing about it one night. So did Desmond, the guy you met—he was there with me. He held me back from interfering and he was right."

"He's very handsome, even for an actor," Kate said.

"He's especially handsome for a lawyer, which is what he is," Roxanna responded. "We were trying to allay my father's suspicions. He knew we'd overheard him. So when he emerged that evening, we pretended innocence, on Desmond's advice, and I introduced him to Dad as an actor. His looks, as you observed, made that easy."

"I've lost count," Kate said, "but I don't think I'm doing too well. Shall we order dinner?"

"The details need cleaning up, but you certainly seem to be onto the main story line. Go on."

"There isn't much more. Somehow, later, needing to hide the stolen emerald, the professor fed it to Jasper. Anyone who observed Jasper's routine with Arrie would have thought of it, whether the motive was greed or detection. Was he going to kill the dog?"

"Of course. Or pay someone else to. Fortunately, I guessed what he was up to. I had caught him examining the stone. I demanded it and he wouldn't give it to me. Sometime later, he came in to promise me he wouldn't take it out of the house. There was something about the exact way he said it that made me suspicious. I pretended to calm down and then went to look for the stone. It wasn't where it was supposed to be. My father went into calm assurances that he didn't have it and hadn't hidden it, urging me to search him. He was so smug about it! That, and the sight of Jasper dancing around, gave me the idea. He had fed it to the dog in a hunk of meat, intending to have the dog 'get lost.' When I figured this out, we really had a knockdown fight. I couldn't believe he'd really do that to Arrie."

"Where was Arrie?"

"Locked in the bathroom, crying. She hated the fights. She used to stuff her ears with toilet paper. He and I fought about a lot of things, though never as violently as this. In the end, I threatened him. You see, my mother had mentioned her ring when Arrie and I went to see her—she wanted Arrie to have it but Arrie said I should have it because I was beautiful. Mother hugged Arrie and said, 'You take care of Roxanna—it's far, far better not to be beautiful, believe me, my darling.' "

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"And you got Desmond to leave with the dog under his arm. I gather Jasper had got to know him by now."

"Jasper takes a long time to get to know people well enough to let them pick him up. He may be small, but he's tough. That was me."

"In drag?"

She nodded. "Great fun. I got the idea from Sherlock Holmes. 'My walking clothes,' Irene Adler called them. Desmond borrowed the suit for me from someone my size. The doorman didn't raise an eyebrow."

"So you took Jasper—where?"

"To Desmond's, where I stay most of the time. I walked him, and never have I used a pooper-scooper more diligently. At first we thought we'd keep him in, but poor Jasper is well trained. I tell you, retrieving that emerald from Jasper made me feel like someone in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend.* I well remember you talking about that novel."

"You said you'd get the emerald back if he behaved?"

"More than behaved. I had Desmond as a witness and advisor. I said Arrie and Jasper were to live with me, that he was to give my mother a divorce under fair terms: he could keep the apartment, he had to continue to support Arrie till she finished her education, my mother was to get half his pension, and if he didn't agree I was going to drag him into court accused of theft and abusive conduct."

"And he bought it?"

"Not entirely. I had to give him the emerald and a few other things besides. But I figured I didn't need it and Arrie didn't need it. It hadn't done my mother much good—and it was worth her freedom and ours. I also told him I had a student lined up ready to bring charges of sexual harassment. I scared him. He even cooperated about Arrie's retrieving Jasper. I was going to make him leave the dog at the playground, but I didn't want him to take out his frustrations on the poor beast so I did that, too. Desmond came with me between two closings. Desmond's been great."

"He sounds rather unusual for a lawyer."

"He is. He's quitting. He says there's no point spending your life suing about water damage and helping one firm take over another. I don't know what he's going to do."

"You might suggest acting," Kate said. "And being a waiter on the side."

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"He's thinking of becoming a detective," Roxanna said. "A private eye. Perhaps he could get in touch with you for pointers."

Kate decided not to look for irony in this. "What next?" she asked.

"It's Arrie's vacation next week. We're going down with Desmond to visit my mom. I think with some real encouragement, and the knowledge that the professor is out of her life, she may actually make it. She never took up drinking or prescription drugs until she met him. But she's going to need a lot of help."

"Speaking of 'none of my business,' " Kate said, "may I ask an outrageous question? Just tell me to go to hell if you don't want to answer it. Is the professor Arrie's father or was there someone else?"

"I'll answer that question on one condition," Roxanna said. "That you agree to do me an enormous favor, no questions asked. Is it a bargain?"

"I'll have to think about it," Kate said. "I don't believe in blind promises."

"And I don't believe in gossip—not all of it. My mother did moon around with another guy. His main attraction was that he wasn't lustful. My father is very lustful. He insisted on his rights. That's how he thought of them—as rights. And he still wanted a son."

"You've been angry at him a long time, haven't you?" Kate said.

"I'm getting over it, with help. I don't want Arrie to go through the same thing. Of course, I couldn't have done it without Desmond—especially since the professor had that sleazy lawyer on his side. Mr. Johnson. You met him, too."

Kate looked into her coffee cup. "All right," she said. "It's a bargain."

Roxanna looked up questioningly.

"I'll keep Jasper for Arrie while she's gone. Reed will be overjoyed. —That is, I'll pretend we have him forever, and when he finds out it's only a week or so he'll be overjoyed."

"I think women are reprehensible," Roxanna said, "don't you?" And they laughed together. Kate even found herself wishing Arrie and Jasper had been there.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

BRENDAN DuBOIS

"What are you doing for work?" Sam asked.

Ross tried to make light of it. "Oh, a business down south. We do some government contracts, private stuff. Not very interesting."

"Yeah, but I'm interested. What do you do?"

Ross stared out at the farm, wishing they were talking baseball. "Management work."

Sam said, "This is your older brother talking, Ross, and I don't like the line you're feeding me. I asked a simple question. What exactly do you do for a living . . . ?"

NOT MUCH OF A TRADE

by BRENDAN DuBOIS

Ross had once lived in Tegucigalpa, and between jobs he would pass the hours by walking along the dusty streets, past the lame dogs scuffling in piles of garbage and the children, always tagging after him, their dirty brown hands open in beseechment. In Cancun, he had a villa only a few minutes away from the beach, and from the second-floor balcony he could see the pale blue of the Caribbean, though he always looked toward the streets, at the dark-green buses trundling toward the hotel zone, packed with hotel workers who stared impassively out at the sea.

Now Ross lived in a wooden cottage on a lake in Conner, New Hampshire. The water of the lake was cold and deep blue. The lake was called Piscataqua, a name from the Algonquins, who had lived there for thousands of years, until a pale race arrived in leaking boats from the ocean and burned them out.

His cottage was built on a small point of land that jutted into the

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lakewater. The land was hilly and fell away at the rear to a dirt road that led to Conner. On some days, while clearing away brush or mowing the lawn with a handmower, he wondered what would have happened if the Algonquins had had muskets, if they and the other Indian tribes had had an effective confederation, a good intelligence system. If they had met every landing with muskets and axes, would the boats have stopped? Perhaps. But then again, he always rooted for the underdog, which explained his Red Sox T-shirts.

On this night, Ross ambled out to the rear porch and sat in an old wicker chair. He listened to music from the state's only classical station, from Concord, and sipped at whiskey and lakewater. The whiskey was Jameson's. Rocking in the chair, he watched the sun set in gold and red into the distant mountains and watched the lake darken. The lake was mostly clear of boats. Tourists hadn't discovered it quite yet, though there were cottages here and there. Listening to the hoarse cry of the loons, he remembered his older brother Sam saying it was the cry of the old Indians, crying out their dismay at what had happened to the world. It was a good story. He wished it was true.

This was his home state, and Sam—though Ross hadn't seen him in years—lived only a few towns away. All around the world and back to New Hampshire. He was sure the staff psychiatrists would love that one, though he had no intention of ever seeing them again. He listened to the night sounds and rocked in the chair, feeling the old wounds ache.

Peaceful, but not peaceful enough. He finished his drink and went to work cleaning his guns.

The smell of the gun oil always brought back memories. Of those cool October nights, sitting by the fireplace with Sam, cleaning their deer rifles before the hunting season started. Basic training, and the D.I. hammering him and the other scared recruits as they cleaned and recleaned their automatic weapons. A long, rainy weekend in Vienna, holed up in a pension and waiting for a signal, cleaning his weapons to hide his boredom and fear.

He cleaned his pistols and his revolvers and his shotguns, and even his old deer rifle, but he never touched a weapon of his that was hidden away back in the loft. It was a complex weapon, with a scope and extended magazine and beefed-up slings, and his feelings for the weapon were just as complex. . .

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Ross had once lived a time when things were due yesterday, of flights missed and trains caught just in time. Sleeping and waking in strange hotel rooms, always feeling out of sync, not sure what was going on and where to go, only knowing that quiet men in suits would point him in the right direction. He always carried a large black case with him and at night he would sleep with it nearby, the case fastened to his arm by a thin chain.

Now the days were long, filled only with decisions of when to weed the garden and when to recaulk the boat, of when to drive into Conner and get some kerosene. The nightmares and bad dreams, usually colored in red, didn't come as often, but when sleeping at night his right wrist always itched and ached, and he knew the chain was still there.

His only friend was Tyler, the postman, who drove through the backwoods of Conner delivering mail and gossip. Ross was out behind his cottage, clearing away some brush and saplings, using a small hand axe and saw. He had stripped off his T-shirt and was wearing only workboots and khaki pants. His .45 pistol was strapped to his waist and his upper body was tanned except for the odd white patches and lumps that scarred his skin.

When Tyler's rusty blue Ford station wagon rumbled to a stop near the mailbox, Ross put down his tools and walked over, drying the sweat off his hands with his T-shirt. Tyler was a short old man, completely bald, who always smoked unfiltered Camels. A blue magnetic sign on his car said U.S. Mail in white letters. He nodded to Tyler and the man nodded back, handing over a bundle of fliers and magazines fastened together with elastic bands.

"Here you go, Ross. There's not much there. You don't get any letters, do you? Not much except your magazines."

"I'm not the letter-writing type."

Tyler tapped the ashes off his cigarette and they fell on his grey shirt. "That's a damn shame. The more people like you write, the better business we get, and I can get myself a raise. I'll be coming back again next Tuesday if you're here. Need anything?"

"Some milk and bacon, if you can."

Ross reached into his pants and Tyler held up a wrinkled hand. "You can get me on the flip side, don't worry about it." He took another drag off his cigarette. "Something else you might be worrying about."

An old, familiar tingling tugged at Ross's neck. "Oh? Property taxes going up again?"

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"You should wish. Couple of out-of-staters been nosing around looking for you, asking questions."

"They ask for me specifically?" Ross asked, his voice level.

"Nope. But then again, Ross, there ain't many guys of your age living alone around here, especially one with so many scars as you got." Tyler eyed him. "You've been in some spats in your time, haven't you?"

"Spats is a good word."

"Fair enough. You in trouble with the government or something?"

Ross looked down at his mail. "Could be. I sort of left the people I worked for without saying goodbye."

Tyler chuckled. "Reminds me of what I did back in North Africa during the war. Left for a whorehouse without properly saying goodbye and got some time in the stockade." Tyler looked up and winked at him. "But it was worth it. Listen here, you need some help or something?"

"No, not really."

"Then keep watch. I think you'll be getting some visitors soon. More's the pity, 'cause I enjoy talking to you. Now I gotta get going, I'm wasting money. You take care."

Ross waited until the station wagon was out of sight down the dusty road and then he went up to the house.

Well, he thought. About time.

Inside the cottage, he flipped through the mail, looking again for a letter from his brother Sam, though he knew that was foolish. Sam didn't know he was here. Sam probably didn't even know he was back in the States. But Ross had faith in his brother and he had a feeling that somehow Sam would find out through his sources that he was back. Ross could call him, of course, but that would be too dangerous. He didn't want to drag Sam into this, even though he wanted to talk to his older brother. He threw the mail down on the kitchen table.

"Stuck again, right?" he said aloud. He was hot and sweaty from outside and he took a cold Molson's from the refrigerator and went out to sit on the front porch. He drank the crisp beer, the water beading down his wrist, and watched some water-skiers crisscross the lake, sending up spouts of foam. From the corner of the porch he could see down to the driveway. Some more brush to clear. Got to clear the field. Fields of fire. He stood there, letting the breeze

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coming up from the lake cool him. He remembered one of the last times he had talked to his brother.

It had been right after his stint in the service, when, thanks to his shooting skills, he had been offered his new job. He had been drinking beer with Sam up at his farm in Pierce. They were in the kitchen and Sam's wife Maddy was in the kids' bedrooms, trying to get them to stop squawking. The brothers had talked about past fights and arguments, past stories and deeds. Ross saw that Sam, even though he wasn't yet thirty, had deep lines around his eyes and his hands were squat and rough. Sam worked the farm during the day and drove a delivery truck at night.

"Remember the time we stole those apples from Mr. Pope's farm?" Sam asked. "And how he sent some buckshot after us and nearly had a heart attack?"

"Yeah," Ross said. "Dad almost croaked from that one."

Maddy came into the kitchen, frowned at the collection of empty beer bottles on the table, and then went into the living room. She had swelled with weight in the years Ross had known her, and her face was red and worn.

"You know," Ross continued, "I remember when you told us you were getting married. What a mess. You were eighteen and I knew Dad wanted you to go to college. What made you do that in such a hurry? Love?"

Ross had been smiling, but when he saw the look on his brother's face the smile slipped away.

Sam said, "What makes you think I had a choice?"

"Hunh?"

Sam gave him a sour grin and picked up his beer. "Little brother, you sure can be dumb sometimes. Your nephew Solomon was born in August. Remember what month Maddy and I got married?"

"March. But I remember Ma saying Solomon was premature."

Sam shook his head. "Yeah, that was true. Solomon was premature, but only by a week. C'mon, Ross, she and the kid came home only a couple of days later. No, love didn't make me do it in such a hurry."

From the bedroom off the kitchen, Solomon started screaming, and was soon joined by the twin girls. Sam had frowned.

"Remember this, bro—whatever you do in life, make sure you do it right, 'cause it'll follow you forever."

"Hey," Maddy shouted from the living room, "they're your kids, too, Sam! Make 'em shut up!"

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Sam got up and said, "You know, in high school I got straight A's in math. Straight A's. And I threw that all away for a few steamy nights. Not much of a trade."

True, Ross thought now, not much of a trade.

He finished his Molson's and watched the speedboats. I got travel and money and job security, brother, and I threw away a lot more. A lot more.

He came to love the lake and the cottage after being there only a couple of years. He never tired of watching how the seasons changed the lake. In spring, after the ice growled and broke away, buds would sprout on the trees and the birds would come back, crying almost in joy, it seemed, when they nestled in around the lake. In the fall, those same birds would quietly gather up and fly south, and the reds and oranges along the shoreline made it look like the lake was ablaze.

In the winter, snow cloaked everything in a white silence and he would ski out on the frozen surface, the squeak-squeak of the bindings and the skis cutting through the snow the only sound. On those trips, he would see tracks in the snow, and after a while he could recognize the tiny pads that meant rabbit and the cloven shapes that meant deer. Sometimes he'd follow the tracks just to see where they led, and in a way it was important to see where they hid.

Summer meant warm evenings on the porch sipping whiskey and water, reading old history books, and thinking a lot—and rowing among the inlets and islands around the lake, the oars cutting swiftly and surely through the water. At night he liked to ship the oars, lie back on a blanket in the boat, and look up at the stars, letting the boat drift with the wind. Up there the stars were bright and crowded, almost too intense to look at, and he would gaze at them for hours, sometimes seeing the swift-moving dot of light that meant a satellite.

A military satellite, most likely. Reconnaissance or God knows what. Even out here he couldn't escape them. Disturbed at the sight, he would take up the oars and slowly go home.

One night he awoke suddenly, the sheets wrapped around him, the room stuffy and hot. He tried to remember what he had dreamed, but he couldn't. He got out of bed and walked over to the window, looking at the moonlight dance on the lakewater. Secrets. So many of them. He remembered the last time with Sam.

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He had come home on leave, tanned and sure of what he was doing. It must have been his first year. Sam and he hadn't had many secrets until then. Sam had told him about the time he got caught shoplifting at Weekum's and Ross had told him about the first time he had started to become intimate with a girl. But this time they had gone up to an apple grove on a small hill near Sam's farm and had sat down on a stone wall. It had been fall—Ross remembered their feet crunching on the fall leaves.

"Well," Sam had said, "there's the family farm—though God knows the bank owns most of it."

"Looks good, Sam."

Sam had glanced over at him, a sharp look on his face. "What have you been up to, Ross?"

"Oh, this and that."

"Come on, Ross, I mean working. What are you doing for work?"

Ross tried to make light of it. "Oh, a business down south. We do some government contracts, private stuff. Not very interesting."

"Yeah, but I'm interested. What do you do?"

Ross had stared out at the farm, wishing they were talking baseball. "Management work."

Sam said, "This is your older brother talking, Ross, and I don't like the line you're feeding me. I asked a simple question. What exactly do you do for a living?"

The air felt cold on his face. "I can't tell you," he'd said, and a nasty image came to him of a Frenchman in Marseilles, in a fine suit, looking up in horror as his white shirt was suddenly stained red.

Sam got up. "Well, you're still my brother by blood, but I can't see you as a good brother in my book, for all that. So forget it, Ross—forget I ever asked you an important thing."

Ross had followed Sam back to the farmhouse but the weekend was ruined, and the very few letters he got from Sam after that were brief and dull, and they had never spoken together again.

The following day, he went fishing and didn't catch a thing. When he returned to the cottage he saw a man on his dock. Parker.

The man was in his early forties and dressed in a black two-piece suit and a light-blue shirt with a black tie. His hair was blond and cut short. He lifted a hand in greeting as Ross cut the engine and let the boat drift into the dock.

Ross nodded and tied off the boat, then started walking up to the

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cottage, not bothering to see if Parker was following him. Inside, he grabbed a Molson's and stared out the kitchen window. A black sedan was parked back by the mailbox, and it was empty. Ross peered some and saw a man standing near the grove of trees to the right, and another up on the ridge. They both wore suits and sunglasses—he knew what they carried under their suitcoats. He took a long swallow of the beer and didn't taste a thing. The porch door opened and Parker came in.

"No, thanks," Parker said, noticing the beer. "Can't drink while on duty."

"I didn't offer you one."

Parker smiled. "So you didn't."

He went out to the porch and sat in the wicker chair. Parker followed and leaned against a porch railing. Behind Parker was a rolled-up blind, which moved in the breeze.

"You're here," Ross said. "What do you want?"

Parker held out his fine, soft hands. "We want you."

"Suppose I don't want to go."

"It doesn't really matter what you want, does it? You had an agreement with us and you broke that by running out."

"I didn't run. I flew."

"Whatever. You didn't hide that well, did you? We were expecting plastic surgery, maybe a voice change, or even a bald head—but, nope, you're just the same. We've had camera crews in these god-forsaken woods for the past week watching you, and let me tell you, Ross, I never knew a man could waste so much time weeding a garden and cutting trees. I would think you'd be so bored you'd call us up, begging to come back."

This time Ross tasted the beer. "I don't want to come back. Parker, there must be dozens of young, eager prospects you fellows can recruit. You can go out and peddle your line about fighting terrorism and promoting democracy from the end of a barrel and a 7.62 mm round. I bought it once—why don't you find some other suckers and leave me be?"

Parker folded his arms and sighed. "Except we've got something going on in Central America that needs our attention, and you're our best, Ross, you really are. Nobody else even comes close. But look at you. You're getting fat and lazy. I've read your reports, I know the stuff you've gone through, the weeks you've lived in the jungle on the run. Could you do that now? I doubt it. Not with the job you've made of concealing yourself."

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Ross half watched a water-skier. "Why would I bother to hide? I knew you'd track me here sooner or later."

Parker scratched at a perfect cheek. "You know, they still talk about you in D.C.—the man who left without a word. Why did you leave so quick? Something about your last assignment?"

His last assignment. A two-day trip to Kenya. Routine, but just one more bloody chore.

"No. I realized that when I got up in the morning to shave I couldn't look at myself in the mirror."

Parker smiled. "So grow a beard."

"I like shaving. I didn't like the job any more."

Parker glanced at his wristwatch, and stood. "Enough, then. Here it is. We'll be by tomorrow at noon to pick you up and whatever stuff you need. A few weeks of retraining and then we're off to the south."

A breeze came across the porch, but it didn't cool him. "Suppose I do go?" Ross said. "Suppose I go and instead of taking out the enemy, I send a round over his head? Or suppose I take out a friend instead?"

Parker stood a distance from the porch railing and looked out at the lake. "Accidents can happen, Ross, you've been with us long enough to know that. Accidents of the worst kind. Like a house fire—a house fire where a guy named Sam lives with his wife and three kids. Understand? A house fire if you come and screw it up, a house fire if you don't come. I don't have the time to fool with you any more, Ross. It's been a nice talk but we've got business to attend to. I'll see you tomorrow. At noon."

After Parker left, he sat for a long time in the chair watching the sun, feeling the minutes and hours slip away. Why didn't we do better? he thought. Go up to Canada. Alaska. Change our face. Our look. Anything. Now Sam is threatened. Now what?

The sky grew darker, a deep shade of blue.

He had come here, he then decided, not to hide but to wait for Parker and his friends to come back. Because he wanted them to. Because he wanted to finish it, he wanted to stop it all. Stop hiding. Start something else.

Start running maybe?

Maybe.

The next morning, he got up with the sun, making a quick breakfast of a fried egg and three strips of bacon. A low mist clung to the ground and to the near shore, a faint rippling mass of white. In the

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upstairs loft, he rummaged around in the cardboard boxes and came back down carrying a small leather case in his hands. He put on a heavy wool sweater and went out to the small barn behind the cottage where his old pickup truck was parked. The engine started on the third try and he went down the dirt road, heading to Conner, knowing that unseen eyes were watching him, taking pictures and making recordings.

That early in the morning, Conner looked like a dead town, like a deserted Hollywood movie set. Hardly anything stirred, except for Polly's Place just out on the state road, which was crowded with parked cars. There was a State Police cruiser there and he imagined himself walking in and saying to the trooper, "Excuse me, sir, but there are some men threatening me—and the funny thing is, you and I pay their salaries."

He still hadn't forgotten the route, making the turns when they came up, traveling along old town roads, the truck bouncing over the potholes. At some point he was on a dirt road deep in the woods of Pierce, and he pulled his truck over near a streambed. It was the right place. His memory hadn't failed him.

Ross wondered if he was being followed. Probably, but with what? He hadn't noticed any traffic behind him. He rolled down the side window. Some early-morning birds chirped. The engine creaked as it cooled and then he heard the low thumping of a helicopter. He was sure there was a tracking device hidden somewhere in the pickup, but he didn't care.

He got out of the truck and went into the woods, carrying the leather case in his hands, following the streambed. The ground was spongy and moist, and he heard animals burrow away or run as he went deeper among the trees. Don't worry, friends, he thought, today is someone else's hunting day.

The ground rose and the trees thinned out, and he was at the crest of a hill. Below him, clear land fell away until it reached a farm, a two-story house with an attached barn, and he saw a thin curl of woodsmoke reach toward the sky. The sun was warmer and he pulled off his sweater, lowering himself to the ground, opening the leather case, and pulling out a pair of government-issue binoculars. Stolen, of course.

He brought the binoculars up to his eyes.

So. Sam must be doing well. There was a new truck in the back yard, this year's model. Ross scanned the house. The sunlight was reflecting off the windows and he couldn't see in. What was Sam

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doing? Clumping around the house, getting breakfast, talking to his wife Maddy about the kids or bills? Did a part of him ever wonder, hey, what's Ross doing now? Did he think about Ross at all?

The back door slapped open and a tall boy came out, slouched over, wearing a leather jacket and jeans. Look at that—his nephew Solomon, so tall after all these years. The boy went into the barn and emerged a few moments later, wheeling a motorbike, which he jumped on and started up.

At the sound of the engine, the door opened again and there was Maddy, shaking her finger at Solomon. The boy shrugged his shoulders and drove off. Poor Maddy.

Two young girls then dove out the door and ran past Maddy. The twins, Jennifer and Janice. Pretty soon they'd be young women, probably even tougher to handle than Solomon. Ross shifted on the ground, the earth cool against his chest. He took away the binoculars and rubbed his eyes, and when he looked again his brother was in the yard.

Sam was stockier around the shoulders and the waist, but he still looked the same. Ross focused the glasses and his brother's face came in sharper. A lot more wrinkles, a lot more worries. God, the questions I'd like to ask you, bro. What you've been doing. How the farm's going. Have you gotten over your disappointments, Sam? Have you forgotten all the math you learned in school, the math you thought was going to take you places?

The glasses trembled in his hands. Well, why not? he thought. Let's do it. Let's get up here and walk down. Sam will look up from his chores and glance up at the hill—

He'd love to see the look on his brother's face as he got closer. Surprise, probably. Then shock. Then—

Then *what?* Happiness? Anger? Puzzlement?

Sam would start asking questions, and right then he had an urge to tell it all. To sit down with Sam and tell him everything, like he'd done so many times before. Sam, he would say, you're not going to believe this, but I kill other people for a living. It's what I do and what I get paid for. And if I don't keep on doing it they're going to hurt you and Maddy and the kids.

And Sam would say, No way they would, Ross, we'll take care of them.

Sure. Right. Sam would probably glare at him and say, Why did you come here, then? Why are you putting us in danger? And Sam would be right. Why *had* he come there?

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Why? Because he'd always gone to his older brother when he was in trouble, that's why. He looked again through the binoculars. Sam was working on the engine of the truck. Probably changing the oil himself to save a few bucks. Off in the distance, Ross could hear the helicopter. And he knew he wouldn't go down.

He got up and went back into the woods, the glasses dangling from the strap in his hand.

Later that morning, he cleaned the house and packed some belongings in a knapsack, which he put out on the back porch. He set a small fire in the woodstove and burned some of his papers, then he went out and checked on his boat.

Back on the porch, the sunlight was streaming through and he pulled the bamboo blinds closed. When he caught his breath, he went upstairs to the loft and found, where he'd hidden it far back, a long black case.

He took it gingerly back downstairs and spent the next hour cleaning and putting the weapon together, adjusting the slings and the scope. The smell of the oil was strong in his nostrils, but this time it brought no memories.

What *would* have happened if the Algonquins had killed those early settlers? What *would* have happened if he had told Parker back then, when he was just getting out of the service, that he wasn't interested? What then?

He looked around the cottage. It was such a peaceful place, but he hadn't brought much peace here. Not with his past. And it was no longer time to hide out.

Watch what you do, Sam had said. It'll follow you the rest of your life.

Carrying the sniper's rifle, he went out to the porch. The noon sun was making tiny squares of light on the hardwood floor. He drew the wicker chair close to the side blind, and with a pocket knife he cut away a small square of the fabric.

From across the lake came the sound of the noon whistle from the Conner Volunteer Fire Department. Ross's breathing was now regular and slow. He checked again that his knapsack was by the rear door. From the door to the boat, at a dead run, would only take a minute.

A car approached the cottage. He took another deep breath, raised the rifle to his shoulder, and sighted in on the mailbox. A clear field

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of fire. The black sedan came to a halt. No more time to hide—time to run. He wondered if Parker had a brother who would have warned him. It'll follow you, it'll always follow you.

He worked the action. Parker stepped out, followed by the other men.

Ross took a deep breath and let it out halfway. Then he began squeezing the trigger. It was all he could do.

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a *NEW* Detective Inspector Donoghue story by

PETER TURNBULL

"I hope I didn't disturb you, Ray," said Donoghue on the other end of the line. "But I need you."

"It's my day off, sir," Sussock told him.

"I'm aware of that, Ray, but Christmas leave has left us short-staffed and we have a murder inquiry on our hands. You may have to work, but at least you'll live to see this Christmas and you've already seen twice as many Christmases as the murder victim has seen."

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ALL IN SCARLET WHEN SHE DIED

BY PETER TURNBULL

She was elegant, so elegant. She had the blazing red hair so common among Glasgow womanhood, and a small pert nose, high Scandinavian cheekbones, a face without a trace of makeup—except perhaps, he thought, just a shade of pale lip rouge. It was a face which needed nothing else, a face of surpassing fairness. She wore a thin, three-quarter-length red dress of expensive and tasteful material which clung to her figure—which in itself seemed to him to be perfectly proportioned—and gave way at the hem to two long,

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slender legs encased in fishnet, a red Italian-style high-heeled shoe on each delicate foot. She was, perhaps, twenty-three years old.

She was also, perhaps, the most fetching, most attractive corpse Detective Inspector Donoghue had ever seen.

He knew when he looked at her that she was a dramatic artist. Later that day he would be told that she was indeed an actress and the information came as no surprise. It was not just that the dead girl was beautiful—there are many actresses who are less than attractive, and actors, *too*—it was more the manner in which she lay that convinced Donoghue she was an actress.

She lay in the posture of a woman who is used to using her instrument, which is what Donoghue understood actors and actresses called their bodies, using them to the best advantage and always moving them in three dimensions. Even when walking down the street as one of the crowd, an actor or actress will stand out; they have a sense of self-awareness, a quality of "presence." While those around them move in two dimensions, left and right, forward and backward, dramatic artists have the ability to project themselves in a third dimension. And this woman had it. Even as she lay dead, she was projecting herself—and as she fell, Donoghue thought, she would automatically have induced an element of the theatrical as she performed her final act. Even here on this wasteland, where the footprints in the mud indicated her last audience to be one man and his dog, she had died an actress.

The place was suitably dramatic. An actress has to die with style of one extreme or another, perhaps in a spectacular crash, or amid lavish surroundings—the Ritz in London or the Amsterdam Hilton, perhaps—or in a place like this, a windswept hillside with a winter wood of denuded trees on the skyline and, in the other direction, perhaps a half mile away, the sullen pebble-dashed lowrise tenements of a huge Glasgow housing scheme—a scheme as big as some towns. Above, to complete the perfect backdrop, a low grey sky, full of rain which threatened but never quite came.

And being an actress, so Donoghue had once been told, is a question of timing—knowing when to come in and knowing when to go out. So, to complete the tragedy, the woman in red had timed her exit to perfection. She had died on Christmas Eve.

Donoghue looked up and about him. A sudden gust of wind clutched at the trees on the skyline and made them sway. He watched its progress as it raced down the hill, flattening the taller grass, and he braced himself against its impact as it tugged at his

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hair, caused the collar of his coat to flap against his chin, and bellowed the smoldering tobacco in his pipe bowl into a raging inferno. It tore at the orange tape which had been tied to the metal stakes which had been hammered into the ground around the girl, encompassing her and the foot and paw prints made by her last audience—brilliant luminous orange tape which here described a square with twenty-foot-long sides.

In a moment of abstraction, Donoghue reflected just how pleasingly loud was the clash of orange amid the grey-green-black winter landscape. In a second moment of abstraction, he thought how fortunate it was that she bore no scars or lesions that would otherwise have distorted her image, so that even in her casket she would still be able to project an image of serenity. The ligature would be removed from her swan's neck and any marks it had made would be concealed behind a silk scarf, as many living girls conceal evidence of passionate encounters.

Then the zephyr was gone, and once more he stood, and she lay, in a moderate but stiff northeasterly which promised a rain which never fell.

So it was just eleven o'clock in the forenoon of Christmas Eve, Donoghue told himself, pulling himself back to reality, though he did not doubt that his colleagues who stood about him believed him to be finely training his thoughts on the matter in hand and would not have believed for one second that the Detective Inspector with the homburg, and the pipe with the slightly curved stem, would permit himself such frivolities of thought as to ponder upon the color of the tape against the winter landscape.

Back, back to reality of youth and beauty, of murder, a strip of land with centuries-old grasses, close to a housing scheme where it was by no means uncommon for men of twenty-five or thirty never to have known employment. Eleven o'clock on Christmas Eve morning at his home in Edinburgh, his wife would be beginning to run out of patience, perhaps beginning to speak too harshly and too sharply at Timmy and Louisa, who would be pestering or squabbling, becoming fractious because they could not contain their excitement about what tomorrow might bring. While here in a hollow on waste-ground between Drumchapel and the Bluebell woods was a lady whose life's tomorrows were all her yesterdays. At least she had had the grace to die with her eyes shut.

He was aware of somebody standing beside him and also, a little

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reverently, behind him. He turned and looked at the man who stood there and he raised his eyebrows.

"Combed as far as we can with the available manpower, sir," said King, who was well used to his senior's mannerisms—raised eyebrows meaning "Please answer the question which is so obvious I need not ask it." "We can't find anything which seems to be linked to the murder. We've gone over the ground, taking the most likely route from the locus of the offense to the main thoroughfare with a fine-toothed comb." He shook his head. "Nothing." King was twenty-five years old, bearded, chubby. He was a Detective Constable. Donoghue thought him to be good at his job, one of the stronger members of the team. "Not even a hairpin," said King. "Certainly nothing as handy as a handbag or a topcoat."

"Would she have been carrying a handbag?"

"I would presume so, sir."

"Is that a safe presumption?"

"Yes, sir." Said after a slight hesitation.

"Well, I would be inclined to agree. What color would her handbag have been?"

"Color?" King paused and glanced about him, focusing his attention, in a desperate search for inspiration, on a German Shepherd sitting patiently by its handler. "Color, sir?"

"Color, King. What color handbag would the young woman have chosen?"

"Sir, I really can't think."

"Look at her, King. She has a well developed sense of dress. Red dress, red shoes, natural red hair. What color do you think her handbag would have been?"

"Red or black," offered King.

Donoghue pulled on his pipe and thought that he was perhaps luring King out of his depth. King, he knew, had married a soft-spoken, gentle-mannered Quaker girl who favored pastel shades and never wore jeans or shorts, always only either skirts or dresses. Such was the woman in his life, and asking him to comment on the dress sense of a woman who lusted after style and image was perhaps a little unfair. "Red or black," Donoghue echoed. "Yes, and the coat, too. Mixing and matching of colors is an art which some have and which some do not."

"Indeed, sir."

"Now, the deceased had this art, this skill, that we can assume, and assume most safely. The color of the missing coat may be red

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or black, and I am sure it will be black. Black to balance the red, and also because black is a winter color."

"Yes, sir."

"Her handbag will be either black or red. I think it will be red. Picture her walking down the street with a black coat, black stockings, and red shoes. She would need something to match the red shoes. Perhaps she also had a red hat."

"Sir?"

"A hat. It's cold, is it not?"

King exhaled. His breath hung in the air momentarily before the wind snatched it away.

"She has no outdoor clothing. She is at least half a mile from the nearest houses and that's over rough ground. What do you make of the footprints? Just one set, less indented as they turn away from the body? No woman's footprints?"

"She was carried here."

"But was she alive when she was carried here by a man with a dog?"

"She doesn't look as though she's been dumped, sir," said King, who, in his short period of service, had already seen many corpses—folded up, cut up, stretched out, dumped. None like this. He didn't realize it, but he had also noticed the quality of posture Donoghue had identified. She was not a dumped victim of the lowest of crimes; she was a reclining beauty ready to be cast in bronze.

"But she did not come here willingly?" said Donoghue. "Who would wander willingly out on a night like last night, near zero temperatures, without a topcoat? No gloves, no hat, just a cocktail-party dress and fancy shoes? Whether she was alive or dead when she came here is still open to dispute, that she came here unwillingly or unwittingly there is no doubt."

"Indeed, sir."

"The pathologist?"

"On his way, sir." King turned and by sheer coincidence saw a silver Volvo inch its way through the crowd of onlookers, following a path cleared by the police, who kept the crowd confined to the built-up area and did not permit any trespass onto the wasteground.

King watched the car draw to a stop against the curb and kept his eye on the car as a tall man, a man whose hair was as silver as the car, stepped from the vehicle. The pathologist handed his bag to a police officer and then followed the officer as he made his way across the bleak wasteground toward the triangle of orange tape,

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toward Donoghue and King, half a dozen uniformed police officers and dog handlers, and the corpse. "He's just arriving now, in fact, sir," said King.

Donoghue turned and grunted.

It took the pathologist a good ten minutes to reach the spot where Donoghue and King stood, and when he arrived his hair was blown into disarray, his shoes and trouser bottoms were splattered with mud.

"Good morning," he said with a cheery smile. His hair might have been ruffled, but his composure was not.

"Good morning, Dr. Reynolds." Donoghue took his pipe from his mouth.

"Good morning, sir." King stepped to one side.

Dr. Reynolds peered at the dead girl and sighed, touched, thought Donoghue, by the tragedy of death of one so young.

"When was she found?" asked Reynolds.

Donoghue looked at King.

"About eight-thirty this morning, sir," said King. "She was seen lying here by a woman who lives in one of those houses over there and phoned the police, asking us to investigate what she thought might be a body on the wasteground. We dispatched a vehicle and the officer confirmed the existence of a body as reported. We arrived at about 0900 hours. The police surgeon arrived at 0915 and confirmed death. That's the sequence of events so far, sir."

"I see," said Reynolds. "Well, let's take a closer look." He stooped and eased himself under the tape and knelt down by the corpse. He delicately examined the ligature around her neck and ran his fingertips gently down the side of the bruising on her throat. "There's no other evident marks or injuries except for the bruising to the neck?"

"That's all we've noticed, sir," said Donoghue. "We had the scene-of-crime officer pay special attention to the bruising when he photographed the deceased."

Reynolds stood and rejoined the officers. "She wasn't strangled," he said quietly, though the effect of his words carried a long way, echoing clearly, like a softly tolling bell on a still summer's evening.

"I'm sorry?"

"She wasn't strangled," he repeated. "I'm afraid I'll have to cut her up to find out why she died, but I can tell you now that the ligature around her neck, and the marks it has made, has nothing to do with her death."

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"It's not?"

"No," said Reynolds. "It was probably an attempt at strangulation done before death or immediately after death. The skin will still bruise for about five minutes after death has occurred. It was probably done to give an impression of death by strangulation, for whatever motive. If she had been strangled, there would be significantly more bruising than that and it would encompass the circumference of the neck and not be localized as it is. Also, the cord is too weak for the purpose, it's little more than rough twine. It would snap before it could be tightened with enough pressure to cause death."

"So we have another problem to solve."

"Well, that's what I'm here for, and I hope to have the problem solved before too long. It's a neat corpse and a fresh one—the cause of death should be easy enough to determine. —I won't need the ligature. Do you wish me to cut it from the body?"

"Well, if you don't need it, sir," said Donoghue. "It will give us something to be working on. We've already taken plaster casts of the footprints, the ligature would be an extra strand."

"Yes, it is an appropriate phrase, isn't it?" said Reynolds. "Do you know her?"

Donoghue shook his head. "No, sir. There's no I.D., not that we can see. No handbag, topcoat, or any other possessions. We have just her and what she's lying down in."

"Odd posture." Reynolds, kneeling and taking a Swiss army knife from his pocket, selected the scissors and cut the twine. "See," he said. "One snip straight through. This string would have snapped if any real pressure had been applied, pressure of the sort that would be necessary to strangle her." He handed the ligature to King, who placed it in a self-sealing cellophane sachet. "Her posture," said Reynolds, "her legs together, her head to one side, her hands neatly in front of her—"

"Just as you'd like to see your daughter sleeping," said Donoghue. "If you see what I mean?"

"As though she had been positioned like that, or as if she had just decided to go to sleep. Well, I think I can do little more here—do you have a stretcher and a blanket?"

"Both standing by, sir."

"Good, we'll take her to the Royal Infirmary. I'll begin the postmortem as soon as I can."

Two cops carried the stretcher across the wasteground toward the houses, toward the silent crowd and a black, windowless van. Don-

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oghue and Reynolds followed the stretcher, leaving King to organize the uniformed police officers to begin another, wider sweep search of the wasteland, from the trees on the skyline to the houses.

As the stretcher was carried to the van through a gap in the crowd, some of whom took off their hats, some of whom genuflected, some of whom pulled on cigarettes and gaped, Donoghue heard one woman say that she'd known it had to be a death—there hadn't been a death in the scheme for a month. Not an unnatural death, ye ken.

Raymond Sussock enjoyed being in the room—her room, the "room" of a room and kitchen in Langside, which had once in its early years been the rented home of a family of anything up to ten children, all in one room, one kitchen, and a hallway. Now it was the bought house of W.P.C. Elka Willems, and as such was a good size for a single person. She had decorated it with taste, pale-blue printed wallpaper, pine furniture, books lining one wall and a Van Gogh print on the opposite wall. Here he could relax, here he was comfortable.

He had no home in the true sense of the word. He did have a house, and he had a bedsitter flat. The house was a bungalow in Rutherglen and his wife and son lived there. His wife was a small, pinched-faced shrew of a woman and his son was a rampant homosexual who shared his mother's cosmetics and lotions, much to the complete approval of Mrs. Sussock. They had recently begun going on shopping expeditions together. Sussock's bedsitter was in the west end of the city, close to the university. It was small and cramped, but it was, as Elka Willems had said when she first visited, cozy. Cozy it may be, conveniently situated it may be, but it was noplace to live for a working cop in his fifty-fifth year of life—with its shared kitchen, where his food was regularly plundered, and the other oddball tenants, the mental-hospital discharges, the shifty-eyed young men who probably dealt illegally in this and that, the noise pollution which allowed the sounds of energetic couplings to transmit through the thin dividing walls. A bungalow and bedsitter, but neither was anywhere to go home to.

Only here in Langside, did Detective Sergeant Raymond Sussock find peace, tranquility, and relaxation. He turned over onto his side, reached a hand up out of the sheets, and picked up his watch from the bedside cabinet.

Eleven-thirty. Christmas Eve morning.

In the kitchen, Elka was humming "Deck the Halls with Boughs

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of Holly" and he heard the sound of mugs being placed on the working surface, the sound of coffee being spooned into them, the kettle whistling, and water being poured. She came back into the room with a mug in each hand.

She was six feet tall. Her firmly toned body was in perfect proportion and her flaxen hair, as always when she was off duty, hung down to her shoulders. She was twenty-six years old, Dutch on her father's side.

She handed him one of the mugs with a smile as warm as the coffee. Gripping the mug, Sussock hissed as the heat stung his palm and he put the mug rapidly down on the bedside cabinet. Elka walked across the carpet to the window and stood in front of it, sipping her coffee, allowing most of her body weight to be supported by her right leg. The lace curtains allowed her to look out, but concealed her from public view. Sussock lay in bed and looked at her. She was, he thought, just beautiful, from the front, from the side, from behind.

The phone rang with a soft warbling ring, not harsh and jangly like the phones in P Division Station. Elka placed her mug on the low coffee table between the chairs and walked into the hall and picked the receiver off the phone on the wall. A moment later she stood in the doorway of the room, looked at the greying Detective Sergeant, and said, "It's the slave driver for you."

Sussock groaned and put his hand to his head.

"And well you might groan, Ray." She crossed the floor on raised feet as though she was walking on stilettos. "I'm not at all happy he knows about us. I told you before."

Sussock levered himself out of the bed. He was in reasonable shape for a man of his age, but beside her he felt gauche, a round pink stomach and thin sticks for legs. He was no Adonis to her Venus. Conscious of himself, he reached for her full-length toweling robe and wrapped it about him. "He's discreet," he said. "Fabian wouldn't tell anyone."

She sank into an armchair, curling one leg up under her as she sat. "He'd better be," she said. "Because if he's not, then we're not."

He shot an alarmed glance at her.

"I mean it, Ray. I'm not going to be gossiped about. Go on—answer the damn phone."

Sussock tugged the robe belt tight and strode into the hall. He grabbed up the receiver and said, "Sussock."

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"I hope I didn't disturb you, Ray," said Donoghue on the other end of the line. "But I need you."

"It's my day off, sir."

"I'm aware of that, Ray, but Christmas leave has left us short-staffed and we have a murder inquiry on our hands. You may have to work, but at least you'll live to see this Christmas and you've already seen twice as many Christmases as the murder victim has seen."

"So young?"

"Hardly into her twenties. Can I count on you being here within the hour?"

"Well, that gives me less than thirty minutes, sir. I'll be as quick as I can."

"Just pull on your trousers, Ray, and get here in double time. Come straight to my office."

"Very good, sir." Sussock hung up. He went back into the room. "He wants me in. I have to work."

"Do tell." Elka stood and walked past him into the kitchen and from there into the shower cubicle. She shut the door behind her and turned on the shower. The water was still hissing and steaming as Sussock left the flat, well wrapped up against the cold.

It took Ray Sussock the best part of an hour to reach P Division Police Station at Charing Cross. The traffic was bumper to bumper the whole length of Pollokshaws Road. He decided to gamble on the Kingston Bridge instead of the Jamaica Road Bridge to cross to the north side of the water. It was a gamble that didn't pay; the Kingston Bridge was log jammed.

"Traffic," he said by means of explanation as he entered Donoghue's office.

"No matter." Donoghue sat at his desk, dressed in a three-piece suit, a gold hunter's chain looped across his waistcoat. "Have some coffee and take a seat, please."

"I've just had some coffee, thank you." Sussock pulled the chair away from the front of Donoghue's desk.

"Not for nearly an hour you haven't. Come on, Ray, don't be sour—pour yourself a coffee and I'll tell you what we've got." Sussock smiled and reached for the coffee pot and the spare mug. Filled the mug and reclined into the chair.

"Still no name," said Donoghue, reading from notes in the file

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which as yet had not been written up, let alone typed. "So it's case file number P.D. 9037986 until we find her handle."

"Cause of death, sir?"

"Hypothermia compounded by alcohol abuse." Donoghue patted the telephone. "That information is hot off the press. Dr. Reynolds just called from the G.R.I., and I mean just—I put the blower down just thirty seconds before you knocked on my door. His report will follow in due course, but the nuts and bolts of his finding is that she had a significant amount of alcohol in her blood stream, say the equivalent of half a liter of whisky."

"Strewth." Sussock sipped his coffee. "That's enough for anybody."

"Well, it was enough for her. She probably slumped into unconsciousness, then she may have been subject to an attempt at strangulation, but it was exposure to the elements that killed her, so that she died as a result of hypothermia. She wore few clothes—just a dress and apparently matching lingerie. She was as well dressed underneath as she was on top; all in scarlet when she died. But fashionable clothes don't keep out the cold, and that, plus the amount of alcohol she had consumed, which would have reduced her body's resistance to the cold, caused her death."

"Such a tragedy."

"Interestingly, her body posture indicated that she had not been dumped, but laid out almost. I put that to the pathologist. He suggested—" Donoghue picked up his pipe and lit it before continuing, a frequent habit of his which caused Sussock intense annoyance "—he suggested that the cold may have brought her round, a little like the effect of putting drunken soldiers in cold baths. When she came round, she would already have lost a lot of body temperature. Do you know the mechanics of hypothermia?"

"Not really."

"Neither do I, really, but Dr. Reynolds explained that as the body gets colder it pulls blood into the chest cavity to insulate the vital organs—the heart and the lungs—from the cold. Which is why frostbite attacks the extremities, the fingers, the toes. No blood there to keep them warm. Apparently, the body doesn't view the brain as a vital organ, so it also pulls blood from the head."

"Fascinating."

"It is, really"—though Donoghue didn't know whether or not there was a hint of sarcasm in Sussock's remark. "The significance of this is that as blood is pulled from the brain, it induces a feeling of lightheadedness—and with that a wholly misplaced sense of well being.

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Reynolds suggested it is by no means unlikely that the girl woke up and sat gazing at the lights of Drumchapel, and, smiling happily, decided to go back to sleep. That is a question which will probably never be answered. The issue, though, is that she was carried out and dumped, and because of that she died. She was murdered."

"Of course, but—"

"But nothing. Somebody, most possibly a dog owner, tried to strangle her, probably thought he had succeeded, and then carried her out in a cold night—zero degrees last night—and so she died. No buts, this is murder."

"Very good, sir. Nobody report her missing?"

"Not so far. We've alerted all the police stations so that if someone should—"

The phone on his desk rang.

"Donoghue," said Donoghue into the mouthpiece. "I see." He picked up his pen and scribbled on his notepad. "Right. Detective Sergeant Sussock will be right there—hopefully in about half an hour, but with Christmas traffic— Thank you." He replaced the receiver. "Well, somebody has just reported a daughter missing. Sorry, Ray."

Sussock knew what Donoghue meant—the short-straw job, identification of the deceased by a parent of the deceased. He'd done it many times and may have to do it a few more times before he drew his pension. It was one of the aspects of police work which never got easier with practice.

"Where at, sir?"

"Gorbals." Donoghue looked at his notebook. "Looks like one of the highrises next to the new Sheriff Court, convenient to Bridge Street tube station. I mean, the choice is yours if you wish to take your car."

Sussock took the tube. It was packed. Each train comprised three cars instead of the usual two. People crammed in like sardines, and bulky presents and spiky Christmas trees aggravated the crush. He was reminded of a home he had once had occasion to visit one July which was festooned with Christmas decorations. "Not taken them down yet?" he had remarked. "Just put them up," said the woman in a monotone. "We thought it might cheer us up."

He was crushed against a man whose breath was reeking of whisky and on the seat beneath him two women sat blathering away to each other as though they were on a park bench or in either's

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sitting room. Sussock thought that it was the one unique thing about the Glasgow tube—unlike the London Underground and, so far as he was informed, any other subway system in the world. Glasgow's was the only one where people talked to each other as the train rocked and swayed through the tunnels.

He left the tube at Bridge Street. This was the center of the Gorbals, "the little world," the earliest part of the city, which in time had been swallowed by its sprawling progeny. It was the part of the city that helped label Glasgow with its reputation for toughness and violence. Now the old Gorbals was gone—it had been totally demolished and only the original street pattern remained. The new Gorbals was three highrise flats next to the concrete complex of the new Sheriff Court, "the busiest criminal court in Europe."

Sussock went to the second of the three highrise blocks.

The foyer was enamel-tiled and smelled strongly of disinfectant. There wasn't a trace of graffiti, no drunks, no sign of violence at all. As he stepped into the lift and pressed the button to take him to the seventeenth floor, he felt a hollowness in his chest for he had been brought up in the Gorbals, the old Gorbals, sharing a bed with his parents and brothers and sisters, listening to the screams in the night, finding blood on the common stair in the morning. In many ways he didn't miss the old Gorbals—it was overcrowded, violent, and unsanitary—but when it was demolished, a community, with all that that implies, was demolished as well.

On the seventeenth floor, he searched for Flat 5, the door with the nameplate which read SMELLIE.

"She's twenty-four," said Mrs. Smellie, a bent-framed woman who was probably younger, Sussock thought, than she appeared. She wrung her hands. "I'm awful worried. You know, there's two types of daughter—ones who never let you know where they are and ones who always let you know where they are. Melanie always let me know where she was going. I knew when she wasn't in last night that something had happened to her. I phoned the police, but they said because she was an adult they could only take details. They'd record her officially as a missing person if she hadn't turned up after twenty-four hours." She turned and glanced at the Christmas tree.

"That's standard procedure," said Sussock. "Unless it's a missing child, of course. Most people who go missing return within twenty-four hours. If they're still missing after that time, we do get concerned."

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"Of course. It's difficult to think that she's not a child. There's just me and her—my man died when she was just a babe in arms. She kept me going. If it hadn't been for her I'd have been in the Clyde long ago. In a sense we grew up together, because I had a lot of learning to do when there was no longer a man at my back and she, well, everything was new to her. So anyway, you've found her, aye?"

"Well, we don't know whether it is your daughter, Mrs. Smellie, but the body of a young woman was found near Drumchapel just this morning. It has been taken to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary and I'd like you to accompany me to identify the body."

Then Mrs. Smellie smiled. She said that yes, that would be her, that would be Melanie, she wouldn't go long without telling her mother where she was. "I'll just get my coat," she said.

"Yes," Sussock said, experiencing a terrible sinking feeling. "You do that."

They took a taxi to the G.R.I. Riding in the back of the slow-moving vehicle during the halting journey, Sussock teased information from Mrs. Smellie about her daughter.

"She's an actress—except she's not," said the round-eyed Mrs. Smellie, spilling over as she spoke.

"Meaning?"

"Well, she can do it, and do it well, but she's just waiting for a break, you know."

Sussock said, "Aye," because for him "breaks" were things that had happened in his past and gone by him before he knew they had been there. Youth, he often agreed, is wasted on the young.

"You know," said Mrs. Smellie, eager to see her daughter, "she just wants someone to give her a start. But she's very good, she's got an equity card already—went to France as part of a dancing troupe to get her card, so she did."

"What does she do when she isn't working as an actress?"

"She writes novels. She was going to be an actress and a novelist. She's going to do big things, Melanie is. Big things."

"Has she ever made any money from acting or writing?"

"Not yet. She's written a novel or two but can't get them published, and she's had small parts here and there, but they don't pay."

"Well, the woman who was found this morning was a particularly well dressed lady, so it may not be Melanie, after all."

"Oh, it'll be Melanie all right. She'd not keep me on tenterhooks any longer than she had to. She was probably partying and couldn't

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get to a phone. Her clothes—well, I bought them, all her wardrobe. I spend every living penny on her, dote on her, she's all I have."

"Where was she last night?"

"Drumchapel."

Sussock glanced at her. "Mrs. Smellie, you *have* been listening to me? You *are* aware where we are going and why?"

"She was visiting Chalmers."

"Chalmers?" Sussock glanced out of the window. The pavements were packed, decorative lights strung across the street. The cars' headlights burned even though it was still only early afternoon. There was excitement and jollity and warmth and death.

"Chalmers—aye, he's—well, I'd prefer to see her with another, but she's got to choose her own friends."

"What's his surname?"

"Pynchos."

Sussock took out his notebook and ballpoint. "You don't mind if I take a few notes?"

"Not at all."

"What's his address?"

"Nineteen Dykebar Wynd. He's got a telephone as well."

"Lives alone?"

"Parents. But they're out a lot, Melanie says."

"Does he work?"

"There's no work in Glasgow. Even for young men."

"How old is he?"

"Same age as Melanie."

Sussock grabbed the strap inside the taxi as the vehicle braked hard to avoid a tottering man, who seemed full of the other sort of Christmas spirit.

In the bowels of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, the mortuary attendant peeled back the sheet and exposed the face and head of a young woman.

Mrs. Smellie gazed at her daughter with adoration and pleasure. The attendant's mouth fell open and he paled in amazement.

Outside the hospital, just underneath the magnificent curving proud Victorian edifice adjacent to the green-roofed Cathedral, Mrs. Smellie stood with Detective Sergeant Sussock. The day-long promise of rain was being fulfilled in the form of a fine drizzle. The sky was low and dark.

"She's in hospital," said Mrs. Smellie. "But she'll be all right,

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she'll be home soon, that's what hospitals are for, to make people fit again."

"Look, Mrs. Smellie—" Sussock struggled with the words. "That was your daughter in there?"

"Oh, yes—that was Melanie. She'll be home soon. I'll need to get into town, get an extra present for her to come home to. And I'll need some food. I don't think I've enough food and the shops will be closed for two days—"

"Mrs. Smellie." Sussock felt his voice harden. "I really think you ought to accompany me back to the police station."

"What for? I can't tell you anything." Mrs. Smellie began to walk toward College Street. "I have only a little time left," she said.

Sussock hurried after her. "I think I'd like to ask someone to have a chat with you—"

"No. I've got no time. Just a few hours before everything's shut."

Sussock got hold of her arm. She wrenched it free and walked into the traffic stream with suicidal abandon. Sussock made to follow, but then stepped rapidly back onto the pavement to avoid a thundering Clydeside Scottish doubledecker omnibus.

Mrs. Smellie, with almost supernatural luck, made it safely across four lanes of traffic and was lost in the drizzle and the crowds.

"Just two men, I think, sir," said Sussock. "He lives alone for most of the time."

"As you wish, Ray." Donoghue scraped the white ash from his pipe bowl and tapped it into the ashtray. Blue smoke still hung in layers in the still air of his office. It made Sussock's chest hurt. He glanced sideways and saw his reflection in the window, and beyond that the neon lights of central Glasgow. He was surprised to see how slovenly his grey overcoat looked, hanging from his shoulders as it did, like a sack.

"How did Mrs. Smellie take the death of her daughter?"

Donoghue began to refill his pipe.

"It was the most difficult identification of next of kin that I have attended," said Sussock abstractly.

"Did she go off her head?" asked Donoghue. "Poor woman."

"Could say that," said Sussock. "I guess you could say that."

Sussock followed the police van in his own car. The convoy drew up outside the close mouth of 19 Dykebar Wynd. The door with the Pynchos' nameplate was ground left. Sussock pressed the bell and,

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in doing so, triggered a tune which played loudly in the interior of the house. The two uniformed cops smiled at each other. The tune was still playing when Chalmers Pynchos opened the door.

He stood squarely in the doorway—amused, if anything, to see the three men standing there. He had a round "baby face," short, curly gold hair, and was naked except for a pair of red boxer shorts and training shoes. His chest rippled with muscle, he had strong arms and legs, and he glistened with body oil.

In a closed room, a dog barked.

"Police," said Sussock, and Chalmers Pynchos smiled a smile which wasn't a spit short of a sneer.

"We'd like to come in. Just for a chat. Stop you freezing if nothing else. I mean, you're hardly dressed for the weather."

Pynchos ran a loving palm over his chest. "I'm not that soft."

"We'd like to come in," said Sussock. "But we can just as easily talk here. Choice is yours."

"My choice." Pynchos smiled. "In that case, you can come in. So long as it's my decision. You don't have a warrant, do you?"

"Why? Have you got something to hide?"

"No, just making sure the terms are mine. And just finding out what the bottom line is."

"The bottom line is as far down as you care to draw it. Shall we go inside?"

Inside, the Pynchos household was smooth and velvet, pictures of men lifting weights, and not a few photographs of Pynchos Junior himself. There were also not a few mirrors—more photographs and mirrors, in fact, than wallpaper. As they entered the living room, Sussock saw Chalmers Pynchos look left and right, savoring his image. He turned and faced the policemen and smiled, flexing his chest muscles. Mistletoe hung from a lampshade.

"Live with your parents, I hear," said Sussock.

"Yes, but they're very good and let me have the house to myself most days. What do you want?"

"We're calling about a girl, Melanie Smellie. We think you know her."

Chalmers Pynchos smiled. "Melanie. Yes, I know Melanie. She's okay."

"You think so. Just okay?"

The young man shrugged. "Okay as they go. I mean, I only go with lookers, and as lookers go she was okay."

"So when did you see her last?"

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"Why? Has she made a complaint or something?"

"Should she?"

"I guess if she felt she wanted to be awkward she could make a complaint. She wouldn't be the first. I wondered why she didn't come back asking for her coat." Then he clenched his fist, very briefly, not tightly, but he clenched it, and smiled as if smiling at a private joke. All three cops noticed it and Sussock felt the two uniformed men stiffen.

"Don't you like the ladies, then?" Sussock stepped away from the gas fire which was turned up so high his trousers were being scorched.

"Oh, I *love* 'em," said Pynchos. "Love 'em all—the lookers, anyway. But sometimes we don't exactly see eye to eye."

"That right?"

Pynchos shook his head. "You know how it goes."

"Tell us about Melanie Smellie."

"Some handle, eh?" Pynchos leered. "Imagine going through life with a name like that."

"It isn't as odd as some I've heard, Chalmers," said Sussock.

A look of anger flashed across Pynchos' eyes. "You pushing me, cop?"

"Tell us about Melanie," said Sussock again, ignoring the remark. "You saw her last night. You had a row?"

"She told you?"

Sussock said nothing.

"Well, all right—there was a rammy. She was histrionic, you know, an actress. You know what they're like—can't stop acting, all the time pushing. So I told her I had a job and I'd be going away in a couple of weeks' time, away to the sun."

"You work?"

"Now and then. More then than now, but I just swung a contract, two weeks' shooting in Spain."

"Shooting?"

"Film," said Pynchos with an air of forced impatience. "I'm a model."

"Modeling clothes?"

Pynchos shook his head. "Just myself. Men like to look at me as well as women, but I'm not like that myself. Just the ladies for me."

"So what happened last night?"

"Well, she went on and on—said I was leaving her, that I didn't care about her, just kept going on, putting words into my mouth,

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'so that means you don't want me around,' stuff like that. She'd had a bit to drink and the more angry she got, the more she drank. Eventually she slumped."

"So what happened then?"

"What did she tell you happened?"

"Tell us about the cord round her neck."

Pynchos smiled. "So that's it. Attempted murder, is it? Well, listen, pal, that wasn't a murder attempt, I don't care what she said, the cord was too thin. It would have snapped before I could have strangled her. I just did that to amuse myself, sort of tightening it and then releasing it when I heard her begin to choke, tightening and releasing, just to see what it would feel like. I kept it up for twenty minutes, it was good fun. I put a few marks on her neck just so she'd remember not to push me too much when she came back. I mean, she won't do a lot better than me, will she?"

"No," said Sussock. "She won't do a lot better."

Pynchos smiled. "If only she could appreciate things like that, things would be better. In fact, they'd be okay."

"So after you'd finished playing games with her airways, what then?"

"I took the dog for a walk. It's my dad's dog, really, but he likes me better. I took her as well, carried her out the back into the field, took her somewhere to sleep it off. I guess she was a little cold when she woke up and had a sore head. She drinks too much, anyway. Rough justice, cold caring—it's often the only way." He flexed the muscles on his chest.

"That's your philosophy, is it?"

Pynchos shrugged. "Anything wrong with it? It's better than having no philosophy at all. I meet people who don't think. Oh, they are weird, but weird."

"Well, we can talk about that. Right now, I'd like you to come down to the station."

"I was planning to work out."

"That can wait."

"Is that right?"

"That's right, pretty boy. A man in the town wants a wee word with you."

"About what? She's not signed a statement, has she?"

"No."

"Well, then."

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"Because she can't. The man would like to talk to you about the late Melanie Smellie."

"The late—? Hey, it's Christmas, this can wait."

"Just get your coat, please."

"My coat—"

"Get it! And the rest of your gear."

"Didn't take too well to the idea of spending Christmas in the cells," said Sussock. He glanced at his watch. Four P.M. The charging of Chalmers Pynchos and the writing of the report had proved to be the biggest single piece of work in the entire investigation. He stood in Donoghue's office. The formalities had somehow become a little less closely observed and there was a slight easing of the atmosphere.

"It's one Christmas he won't forget," said Donoghue. "But more to the point, neither will the relatives of the victim."

The phone on his desk rang. He glanced at it. He, like Sussock, was standing. Both had their hats and coats on. To answer it or not to answer it?

He picked it up. "Donoghue," he said. "Oh, no. I see. King's on it. Well, I won't be back until the twenty-eighth, I have three days' leave. I don't know, most probably Chief Inspector Findlater. Right. I'll hang around for ten or fifteen minutes." He replaced the receiver. "Pity we don't have any booze in the office, Ray, or we could raise a glass here and then go our separate ways, but I'll have to stay on. I said fifteen minutes, but that could mean thirty or sixty. Another Gorbals incident. A woman jumped from the twelfth floor of a high-rise. She impacted head first, so identification is a problem—even her teeth went every which way. Ray, are you all right?"

Ray Sussock had sagged against the grey filing cabinet, his knees buckled slightly. He shook his head, then began to nod. "Yes, I'm all right. He shook his head, then began to nod. "Yes, I'm all right. I don't think there will be an identification problem. That woman didn't jump from the twelfth floor, she jumped from the seventeenth. I think you'll find her name is Smellie. Flat 5. Floor seventeen. She just lived for her daughter."

So that's where the bottom line is drawn, you draw your own bottom line in a way. Sussock walked down Sauchiehall Street. It was busy and the lights hurt his eyes. Sometimes the light split into two. There had been a brass band from a girls' school, all dressed in brown and evidently not allowed to wear coats against the rain.

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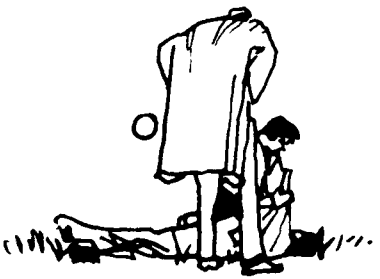
He had stopped and listened as they'd fumbled and groped their way through the carol about gentlemen resting merry.

He walked on and wondered who would be resting merry tonight. Very few, he thought, and carried on walking home. An onlooker would think he staggered, and in staggering he would not be out of place in central Glasgow on Christmas Eve night. He was going straight home, having drunk his fill, but he wanted the journey to last forever because at the end of the journey was a cold, empty room—a chair, a table, a bed which was place of residence for a man of fifty-five, and that was where he'd wake up on Christmas Day, with his life's failure coming crashing in on him with his inevitable hangover.

He could go to Elka's, she'd let him in, but he knew she didn't like his breath reeking of whisky and he'd hit it hard tonight. He hadn't meant to, but he had. He'd walked out of P Division and up into town and into a bar, where he pushed and shoved his way to the gantry and ordered a double, then another and then another. Then he'd walked back down Sauchiehall Street and stopped to listen to the school girl band, not too drunk to notice the players' knuckles whitening in the cold.

Then he continued walking, homing like a wounded animal. At the bottom of Sauchiehall Street, at Charing Cross, there was a gap in the buildings. He could see the sky. The clouds parted and there was old Orion, hunting the heavens, standing tall and straight, his belt almost horizontal.



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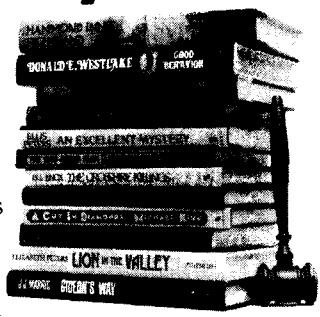

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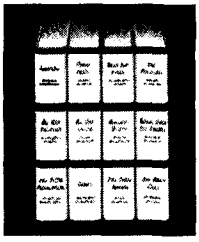

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